The FLINT CHIPPER

THAMES WILLIAMSON

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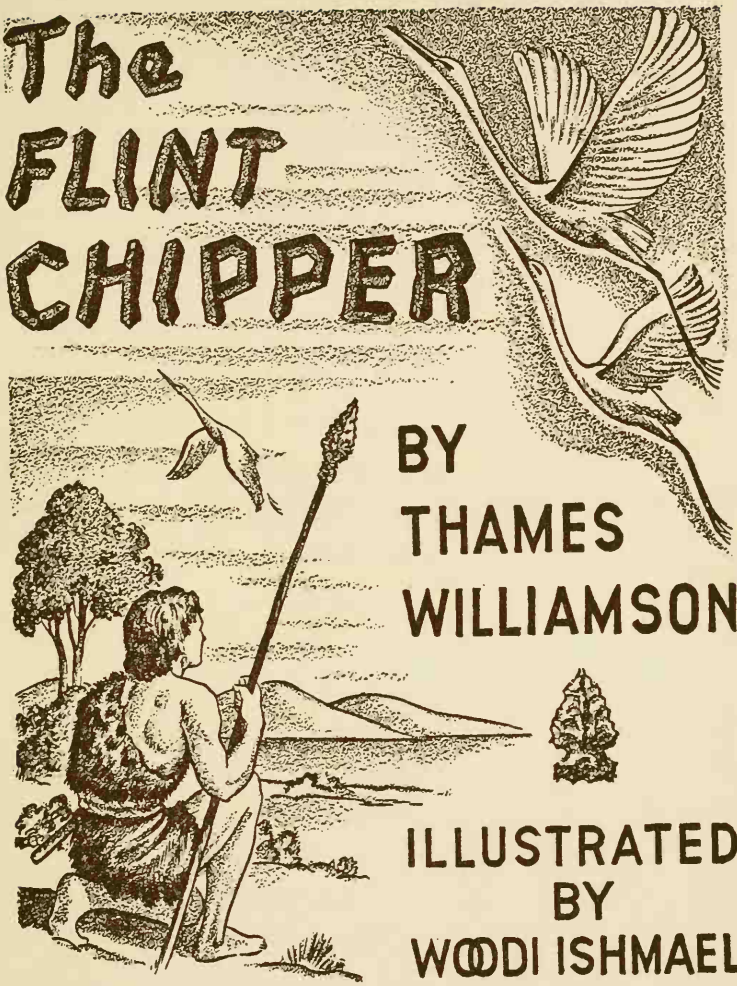
THE FLINT CHIPPER

"You and I are what we are today largely because of what our ancestors were, back in the dim and ancient past which is our racial background. To understand us then is to understand us now."

—W. H. GERHARDT.

The FLINT CHIPPER



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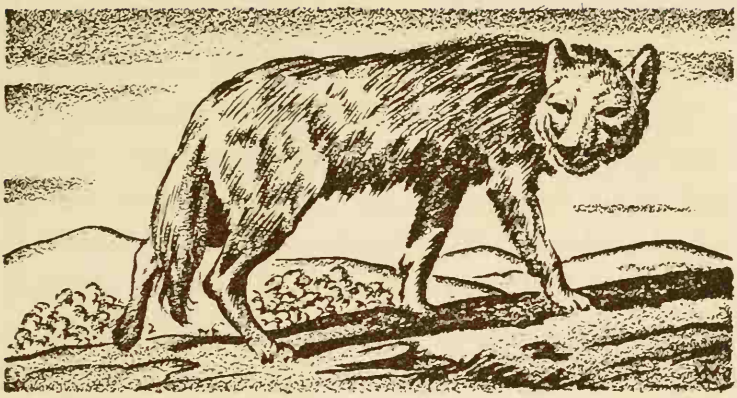


CHAPTER I

Behind the Wolf

DID IT happen twelve thousand years ago, or ten, or even later than that? No one could say, least of all the Hunting People. To them it was simply an undated and a nameless day, a fine spring afternoon in the land which we now call England. The wind was pleasant and the ground free of snow, and because they had heard ducks quacking the hunters had trailed down from the hills to the pond which lay at the head of the valley. A little stream ran into the pond from the upper end, another ran out of it at the lower end; it was fresh

shining water, and the ducks had paused there on their migration to the north.

"Fft!" said a man by the name of Big Foot, all at once. He was disgusted, for the ducks had taken alarm and were winging away. Yes, but perhaps it was not so bad as the hunters thought: a heron had risen from the pond, long-legged and awkward and with the bulging throat that meant it had been feeding. Feeding on what? Perhaps fish, perhaps frogs, or even the tiny creatures which live in shells and think this protection against all enemies. "Let us see what there is for food," said Big Foot, and although he was not the chief of the tribe, everyone nodded agreement.

Everyone? No, not quite. There was a certain boy who did not join the prowling search for food, but went apart and sat down, his face stilled by what he was thinking. Opening a hide pouch which hung about his neck on leathern cords he drew out a piece of flint. He began to study the hard brownish stone. Presently he took from his pouch a short compact bone, the ankle bone of a wild boar; and with this he pressed a little on the flint, carefully and with thoughtful eyes.

"Ha, you are truly called Flint Chipper!" exclaimed a voice. "Juk the Flint Chipper, and no other!"

Juk glanced up. A certain hunter was kindling fire, others of the tribe were poking about in the mud for

fresh-water mussels, the rest of the men were lurking along the edge of the pond with harpoons; and among these last ones was the youth who had spoken to Juk.

"I am the Flint Chipper," answered Juk, in a steady voice; "and I have no shame on that account, though the name was given me in laughter. What have you caught, Awal?"

"Mud," shrugged Awal, and showed his harpoon, a barbed bone lashed to a long stick. "The fish do not come close enough. When they run thick in narrow streams it is easy to spear them, but hereabouts a harpoon is like teeth with no meat to chew."

An old man lifted up from the fire he was tending. He was called Talker, because it pleased him to chat and argue, even to the point of thrusting himself between two who were speaking privately, as Juk and Awal were speaking this afternoon.

"It was at the shore of the boundless sea that the fish did that," observed Talker. "At this season they would hurry out of the broad, tooth-gnashing ocean into streams where they believed themselves safe; and we speared them, but here it is not like that."

"So I said," declared Awal, and came to watch Juk, and to smile at him. "Now Juk, if you play with that piece of flint, how will you eat? You hunt no food today."

"I am not hungry," was the reply.

"Not now, but once there are frogs or crawfish roasting in the fire, the odor of it will dart up your nostrils and hold you fast—then what?"

Juk looked up, chuckling a little. "Then Awal will give me part of what he has, for the reason that in past days I have given him flints!"

They laughed in their brief, hoarse way, Awal watching while Juk continued to study the piece of flint in his hand. Their faces were rude, yet not unpleasing. The general contour was oval, the features were regular, with tanned windburned skin and dark hair. Awal's eyes were brown, Juk's were hazel; for even in that far-off time the races of England-to-be were badly mixed, so that there was in the same tribe or horde a variety of physical types. Brown eyes and hazel eyes, Awal robust and Juk more slender, but they were dressed alike. Each was barefooted, bareheaded, his only clothing a hide taken from the reindeer which still lingered on in Britain. A leathern thong served as a belt, and now Awal hooked his thumbs in his belt and put back his head, laughing:

"Why do you keep turning that piece of flint around and around, like a squirrel turns a nut?"

"For a similar reason," said Juk. "To find out how it is best done."

Awal glanced down at his belt. Thrust between the

leathern thong and his reindeer robe there was a celt or hatchet, the head made of stone, the handle of wood. It was a weapon but also a tool, and seeing that Juk still played with the flint, Awal jerked out his hatchet and said impatiently:

"Let me smash it for you. A blow will open it."

Juk drew the flint back out of harm's way. "You know as little as a squirrel," he retorted. "Flint is not granite, not sandstone. It is different. See those colored lines in it, waving like game trails along a hillside? They mark layers in the flint, and to make the stuff split right, you must first ponder those layers and learn how to press upon them. This is no work for a crushing hatchet blow."

Talker looked at them from his fire. "Juk is right," said the old man. "In former times there was in our tribe—before a wild bull ripped him open as a knife might rip open a hare—in this tribe of ours there was then a clever one called Mukoss, and always Mukoss studied flint in this selfsame way. Juk took his knowledge from Mukoss. The lad knows how to work with flint."

"And you," retorted Awal, "you do not know how to work with fire. It is out!"

The hunters turned from the shore of the pond and fell to laughing at Talker. He was ancient and stiff-

jointed; and since today the women and younger children of the tribe had remained at the cave they called home, Talker had been set to tend the fire. And now it was out, and the men were guffawing.

"The wood is damp from the moist weather," grumbled Talker, opening his pouch. He took out a pair of iron pyrites, bits of a mineral especially valuable for fire-making. Also from his hide bag Talker produced some scraps of tinder, which was the inner pulp of a dead log, shredded and carefully dried for help in kindling a blaze. Crouching over the tinder, the old man struck the pyrites skillfully together; sparks flew out, most of them dying in the air, but one successfully igniting the dry pulpwood. Smoke rose up, Talker blew and blew, red fire appeared. The ancient one put on scraps of fuel, grumbling: "There is fire before there is food to cook!"

"Not quite that!" said a man by the name of Karakaa. "I have a frog and as many snails as there are fingers to my right hand."

Everyone looked at Karakaa. He was the chief of the tribe, a strong well-made man of middle height, quiet but wise, and a clever hunter. Around Karakaa's neck there was a string of bear's teeth, each with a hole bored through it and all of them held together by a tendon, that people might not forget the beast which this man

had slain. Karakaa was able; he was always getting things done before anyone else. Big Foot and others bent to the task of equaling the leader, but Juk kept on studying his flint, and Awal waited to see what would happen to it.

At last Juk decided how to do it. He grasped the flint in his left hand, took the bone in his right hand, and pressed down upon the layered stone. It split into two parts, a big piece and a small thin sliver. Carelessly Awal drew back his foot to kick the smaller piece aside, but Juk snatched it up and put it in his pouch.

"Huh, what is that little thing good for?" demanded Awal.

"All flint is good for something," was the reply; "a scraper for hides, an edge to split tendons needed as thread, many such things. Do you think I carry flint all the way from the mine, just to cast it away!"

"You keep rubbish like Goort the wizard," chuckled Awal; "save that Goort works magic with his."

"And I with my own rubbish, perhaps," said Juk. "Watch now!"

The boy began to flake small chips from the larger piece of flint, Awal wrinkling his brow and asking:

"What is it you make?"

"A spear head," replied Juk; "not for fish like your harpoon, but for large animals."

"Or for people!" put in Talker.

Juk chipped and chipped, then his hand slipped and he nicked a deep hole in the edge of the spear head.

"You have ruined it," said Awal regretfully.

The Flint Chipper frowned, but quickly he was smiling again. Deliberately he made a second notch in the edge of the flint and cried out:

"It is not ruined! Now it is a saw, for cutting leather, or roots, or even meat. Ha!"

The boy's face was aglow with triumph, but Awal was no longer interested in the flint chipping, and accordingly turned away.

"I must find something to eat," said Awal, yawning.

Awal went to work, and after a while he harpooned an unwary frog. This, with three crawfish, was his haul for the day, but Karakaa speared a fish that was longer than his hand, and the others gathered enough snails and mussels to make a fair meal. One by one the hunters came to the fire to roast what they had caught, and afterward they munched and talked.

"Good," said Talker, crunching the shell of a crawfish between his teeth. "In winter meat is a fine thing, but when spring comes there is an urge inside a man that sends him after different food, such as the creatures that dwell in water, and the bulbs of the wild onion and other green growing things."

"Yes, we must gather bulbs and shoots," declared Karakaa. "They will soon be seen from afar."

"Seen from afar!" laughed Awal, tossing Juk a crawfish. "How can that be?"

"Why not?" said the chief. "If you look at the earth near at hand there is little to see, but if you narrow your eyes and gaze far away, then many green shoots together will make a haze that you can see very well. It is true of trees budding on a distant hill, true also of green growing things like wild onions and other plants that we eat and never know the name of."

Awal looked up to try it. He gazed at the low hills off to the southwest, squinting and murmuring:

"Perhaps it is yet too early in the season, because I see nothing. Ho, what is that?"

"Where?"

The tribesmen turned and gazed the way that Awal pointed. A brownish-gray animal was moving up out of the valley to the shelter of the hills. It went silently and with easy swiftness, hard to see and yet perceptible to the keen eyes of the Hunting People.

"A wolf," said Karakaa.

"He is stopping," added Big Foot.

Karakaa and his men watched intently. The wolf's going was probably of no importance; nevertheless it was the custom of the hunters to observe all such hap-

penings. It was their daily habit, their recreation and sometimes their serious business; no one could ever tell about that.

"Now he turns to look back," murmured Juk, "and now he goes on."

The wolf trotted up the slope, gained the ridge, and once more paused to look back the way he had come. Karakaa was impressed.

"To look back like that," he said, "means that the wolf is watching something. Is he afraid?"

It was not likely. Back in the hills there were fierce beasts that a wolf might well stand in fear of, but in the open grass-grown valley there were no such beasts. Wolves were daring creatures, and at this time of year they had cubs hidden away; for the sake of these cubs they were willing to fight almost anything that might yield food, fearing no valley animal at all. There was only one enemy which could easily send a wolf trotting home unladen with food—Man.

"I guess that men are down there," said Talker, turning his eyes down the valley.

Instantly the tribesmen rose to their feet, even Juk forgetting his flint chipping to stand up with the others. For this was no time to dream. There were other groups of people dwelling not so far off, some in neighboring valleys, others farther back in the hills, but none in the

lower valley. Down beyond the pond there was little game, and the region was too open to attack, so that the tribes of the region avoided it. If, therefore, men were down there they were strangers, and also enemies. Strangers were always enemies. That was the rule of life in the days of Juk and Awal, and accordingly they gazed earnestly, shading their eyes against the afternoon sun and wondering what had made the wolf flee away.

"I see something," said Karakaa at length. "Dark blotches."

"Do they move this way?" demanded Awal excitedly.

"Yes," said a man by the name of Nashad. "We had better put out the fire, lest it attract attention to us."

Talker bent down and began to scoop dirt together. He collected a heap of it, then dashed it upon the fire in such a way that the flames were quickly smothered and the smoke choked down, all in less time than it would take a duck to wing across the pond.

"People coming up the valley," muttered Talker. "I like that little."

"What I like but little is the number of them," said Karakaa, still gazing out from under his hand. "They are so thick they make the ground dark where they pass. We shall do well to retreat."

"Retreat?" said Awal, who liked a fight.

"Does one finger struggle against the whole hand!"

retorted the chief of the tribe. "Let us go toward our cave, but by a roundabout trail, so that no one may follow us home."

They picked up their things and started, Karakaa ahead, the older warriors next, and at the end of the straggling column Juk and Awal. Were they afraid? Not exactly. If Karakaa thought the strangers too many for his tribe to challenge, then it was certainly good sense to get to cover, and thus avoid trouble. Even the bold Awal knew that, although he was always looking for a chance to try his weapons—his stone hatchet and his flint dagger, and his spear. The spear was his pride, for the shaft was of wood and the head was of chipped stone lashed to the handle by means of sinews, and because of the length and straightness of the ashen shaft the weapon was better than Juk's, and as good as Big Foot's or Talker's. Awal glanced back over his shoulder, whereupon Juk smiled:

"You gaze back, like the wolf!"

"Not from fright," declared Awal. "I only wonder who the strangers might be."

As for that there was no telling, at any rate not now. Karakaa was taking his men out of sight, willows between themselves and the strangers of the lower valley. Soon their ascending zigzag trail took them above the willows, but then there were hazel thickets on either

side, and after that the swells of the undulating earth, rising gradually toward higher hills. Then behind a screen of thick concealing fir trees the hunters paused to gaze back; they had come up onto a rocky headland, and beyond the firs the valley lay open and clearly visible.

"I see them still," said Karakaa, and was worried. "Come."

Juk knew why the chief was worried. It was because the strangers were so many. There seemed to be a vast horde of them, more people in one place than Juk had seen since the time of the reindeer hunt, years ago, when he was a small boy. And the trouble was that while the reindeer hunters were friendly with one another, the strangers in the valley were enemies.

"Do not linger," said Karakaa, as Awal halted to look back. "We can gaze at them from near our cave, and we must get to that cave in time to keep the women from making telltale fire. Lose no time."

The cave was not far off, but it seemed a long way because of the roundabout course they were taking. In and out of mossy hollows and rocky stretches they trudged, instinctively hiding their trail as a safeguard against pursuit. The day was almost spent, and since it would now soon be fire-making time Karakaa turned and headed straight for the cave.

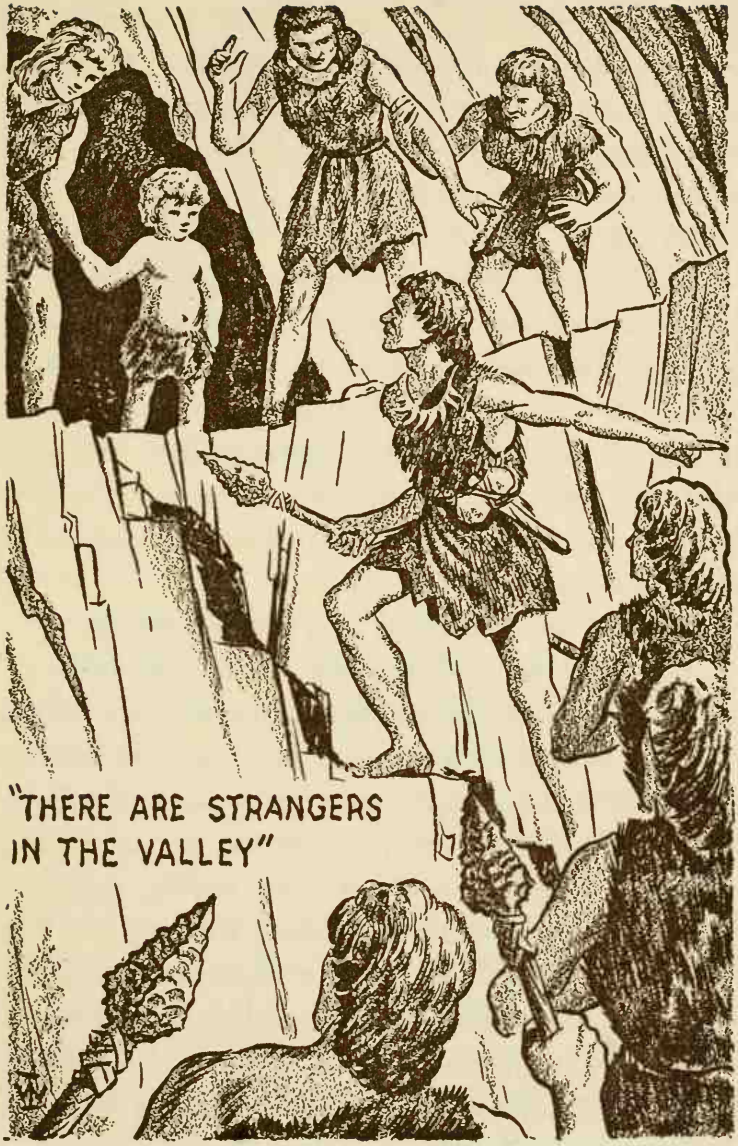
"Our trail is safe," he said.

In a few minutes they saw the cave. There was an abrupt limestone cliff, not tremendously high but very steep. Halfway up the cliff appeared a large cave, a natural grotto which ancient men had found and made larger by years of intermittent pecking and digging. Likewise men had cut steps into the side of the slope, so that they could reach the cave from the bottom. In times gone by many a tribe had assaulted those steps, wanting to oust the people of the cavern and take it for themselves; but now for many months Karakaa's tribe had held possession of the place, and called it home. Women and children appeared on the ledge which was a kind of porch in front of the cave and they began to call out to the men below.

"Do you bring fish?" cried a woman.

"We bring news that is perhaps not good news," answered Karakaa, clambering up the steps. "There are strangers in the valley, beyond the pond."

The women fell to exclaiming and asking fearful questions, but a man cut them short. It was Goort the wizard. Juk and Awal climbed up to the ledge to find him waving the women and children away, so that he himself could hear the tale. Goort was a stern humpshouldered man, given to staying in the back of the cave and contriving magical spells in the darkness there, but


"THERE ARE STRANGERS
IN THE VALLEY"

at Karakaa's news he was as interested as anyone. He advanced to meet the chief, a stick thrust through a hole in the lobe of his right ear, and long cords of shells and odd-shaped bits of wood and the skulls of small animals dangling from his belt.

"Strangers?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Karakaa. "Let us look at them."

The hunters clambered up past the mouth of the cave, Juk and Awal scampering ahead in their eagerness to be the first to see. They came to a bald high spot toward the top of the cliff, a lookout station which they used when there were suspicious doings in the valley below. Here the men of the tribe stood in a knot, facing to the south, and waiting.

"The sun will show us," murmured Karakaa.

That was a way the sun had. It was the belief of Juk and Awal and their people that the sun was a friend, each day obliged to leave Man, but hating to because of the dark which even strong warriors habitually dread. Thus the kindly sun had got into the way of shining with unusual force just before it set, sinking and sinking, and then on the point of death suddenly flooding the world with a mellow afterglow which revealed all objects in so sharp and clear an outline that whoever watched must inevitably think of sunrise and the cheering light of the day to come. The sun did this now, and

in the golden illumination which it spread upon the valley the Hunting People had their first good look at the strangers. And they were astonished at what they saw.

"Not all of them are people!" cried Karakaa. "There are animals with them."

Juk found himself sniffing loudly. It was too far off for the scent of the animals to come to him, but every creature has its own odor, and the Hunting People had learned to gather news with their noses. Awal and Juk sniffed, and the older men likewise sniffed, wanting to know what kind of animals traveled with the strangers.

"I smell nothing," said Big Foot suddenly, "but I recognize the way the animals throw their legs. They are wild horses."

"It is impossible," frowned the wizard. "Only demons could make wild horses travel so close to them."

"Then perhaps these strangers are demons," said Awal.

"Silence!" cried Goort, for demons, like evil spirits in general, were the concern of the tribal wizard, and for this reason Goort did not like anyone else to venture an opinion upon such things.

Goort said it was impossible, nevertheless the animals were really horses. The Hunting People watched until they were certain of it, then they went back down to the cave and Karakaa ordered the women to build no fires. There was mystery and danger about, for even

now the strangers were halting at the lower end of the pond and were preparing to camp. Strangers who traveled with a herd of wild horses! How could it be? Karakaa and his men were familiar with horses, but there were few of these beasts left in the hills, and certainly they were hard to kill or trap. For the most part the Hunting People took toll of them by hiding near a shallow place in a sizable stream, and then spearing the creatures as they forded over to the other side. Never in all their experience had they seen horses that strode along with men, not fleeing but tolerating the ones who walked on two feet and bore weapons. It all sounded so queer, so unreal and downright wrong, that the people in the cave were uneasy, not knowing what to think of it.

"What shall we do?" murmured someone.

"I think these strangers merely camp down there for the night," said Goort confidently. "Tomorrow they will pass on and leave us in peace."

"We shall see," said Karakaa, and from his knitted brows and grudging tone it was apparent to Juk and Awal that the chief did not believe the matter would be settled so easily.

CHAPTER II

The Amazing Strangers

LATER that evening Karakaa's people noticed a glow from the direction of the valley; the strangers had built a fire, as Juk and Awal discovered when they climbed to the lookout above the cave. The boys sat watching it a long time, wondering and whispering about the camp down there by the pond; then they crept down to the cave. There, just inside the entrance, the rest of the tribe lay asleep, huddled in their scanty robes and sometimes shivering because of the chill air.

Juk and Awal lay down and slept, Awal serenely, Juk

troubled by an oppressive dream. The Flint Chipper dreamed that he was working on yesterday's spearhead, which by accident he had turned into a saw. He held the piece of flint in his lap, studying how to flake it, but no sooner did he start to press upon it with his bone tool than someone reached over his shoulder and snatched the flint from him. The boy dreamed, then, that he sprang up in anger, but when he whirled to see who had done this thing to him he was alarmed. For he was surrounded by the strangers camped beside the pond, one of them holding the flint and the others laughing. Juk asked for the spearhead, and by way of reply the strangers passed it to one another in rapid succession, each man giving it a big nick before he let it go. One nick after another, until the flint was no larger than a thumbnail, whereupon it was cast down, and then all the strangers began to laugh at Juk, mocking him and jeering him, so that the boy was frightened. He struggled to fight them, and could not lift an arm; he tried to flee, and his legs held him in place as firmly as a tree is held by its roots; he did his best to shout for help, and his voice was like the chirp of a distant cricket. It was a horrid dream, and apparently endless, then all at once he saw no more strangers but only Karakaa and the others of his tribe.

"The strangers!" gasped Juk, scrambling to his feet. "Where are they? Did you slay them?"

"What!" exclaimed Karakaa, and looked amazed.

"He must have dreamed a dream," said Awal.

It was sunrise. Juk was at the mouth of the cave, and there were no bits of flint about; indeed, the nicked spearhead lay near his sleeping place, not changed since yesterday.

"A dream," murmured Juk. "Yes, perhaps."

"Tell me all that happened to you in your sleep," demanded Goort the wizard. "I will untangle its meaning."

Juk told the tale from the beginning, everyone listening carefully and with sober face. Why not! The world of dreams continues to puzzle many of the peoples of the present day, and in Juk's time it was a baffling mystery of the highest importance. What happened in dreams was often a reflection of the happenings of waking life, a reflection or a portent of things to come, so that if you wished to escape the threat of evils dreamed in your sleep you must tell it all to a wizard and let him advise you as to what to do.

"That is how it was," Juk ended; "so what does it mean?"

"I can tell you," said the wizard slowly. "Yesterday your hand slipped and you ruined the spearhead, then strangers appeared in the lower valley. The strangers were the cause of the nick in the piece of flint you were

working. They used magic to make your hand slip, and last night they sent evil spirits upon you again, seizing the spearhead and nicking it until it was ruined. This they did as a sign of what they mean to do in daylight life. These strangers destroyed your weapon as a symbol of all our weapons; they mean to attack us and slay us."

The wizard paused, the tribesmen shifting uneasily, the women murmuring in alarm. Karakaa said:

"How is this, Goort? You say they wish to destroy us, but yesterday you said they would pass on and leave us in peace."

"Clouds change their shape," answered the wizard haughtily, "and so do the plans of men. In the night that is past the strangers decided to come against us as enemies. Juk's dream proves it."

Karakaa set his jaw. He was a resolute man, and accordingly he did not flinch from what lay ahead.

"We shall go spy on these people," he said. "Goort and Nashad and I shall slip close to them and try to see what they mean to do. Let us start at once, approaching them from the east."

Awal spoke up. "Why from the east?" he asked.

"You ask questions you yourself should be able to answer," retorted the chief. "The valley runs north and south, the hills we can best spy from are east and west. The sun is still rising, and so the people by the pond will

not do much gazing in that direction, lest the light hurt their eyes. They will tend to gaze west, and if we spied upon them from the west they would be likely to see us. Therefore we shall approach from the east, under the screening which trees make and the sun makes also. Come, let us go."

The wizard and Karakaa and Nashad took their weapons and strode off, everybody else remaining at the cave. Juk looked at the women; they had hides to stitch together into robes, but because of their fear of the strangers in the valley the women could not work. Only one was ready to begin when Juk awakened and told his dream, and now she put down her things and murmured with her companions, concerning the strangers and their intent. Juk turned to Awal.

"What shall we do while we wait for the spies to come back?" he asked.

Awal signaled him to come away a little. "Hsst!" he said in Juk's ear. "Did you hear me ask about east and west?"

"Yes."

"It was for a purpose," Awal grinned. "When first Karakaa spoke of spying upon the strangers I had in mind that you and I should do likewise, by ourselves. I wished to know which way the chief would go, so that we could slip off in a different direction."

"Ho! Then you want to go and look from the west, and be seen?" said Juk.

"We must follow the others," declared Awal. "West would be dangerous; Karakaa showed me that. Come. They are far ahead; they will not hear us. It is time to do a little spying of our own."

Juk took his weapons and they slipped away. No one protested, for Awal and his friend were of an age to take care of themselves. They were boys in years, men in the risks and burdens which their life imposed upon them.

"Here is a little trail to follow," said Awal, skirting a thicket. "It will keep us out of the brush, and thus help us not to make noise."

Who had made that trail? Impossible to say. Perhaps it began as a rivulet of rain water, or a bare streak made by a lightning-set fire. Or perhaps some ancient and forgotten beast started it with his feet, as he crunched along the hillside on his way to lair or hunting grounds. A beast, and afterward other animals, gradually wearing a distinct trail into the earth; and now Juk and Awal were following it, because it made traveling easier. Awal gave out a sudden chuckle.

"You dream, and I do not," he said. "Why is that?"

"Who knows!" said Juk vaguely.

"It must be that you resemble Goort the wizard,"

teased Awal. "He is always entertaining spirits in his inner self, and since he is probably full of them, overflowing like a bark cup with water, the rest of the spirits are trying to hole up in you, as men hole up in caves. Ho ho!"

"Make no more such talk," said Juk earnestly, "lest the spirits hear you and act upon what you say. I am a chipper of flint, nothing else. True, I hunt with the others, but there is no room inside me for anything save flint and the things which can be made from it, old-known tools and weapons, and new ones. Especially new ones."

"Why new ones?"

"Ah, because it is well to find better ways of making things. Do you not feel that way, Awal?"

"No," was the blunt answer. "Old weapons are good enough for my hand. If they kill and get me meat, I ask no more. Now we must go slowly, lest Karakaa and the others be hidden near by."

They fell silent, absorbed in the task of creeping down toward the valley without being seen. The trees were thinning out, bushes were more plentiful. Juk and Awal advanced a step at a time, concealing their trail as best they could, and listening at intervals. At such a time as this you could never be too careful. Once the men of Karakaa's tribe were spying upon another people,

and unfriendly eyes saw them, after which it was only a short time before there were stone hatchets crashing down upon the spies. Very cautiously the boys went forward, crawling a while on hands and knees, and then halting. It was close enough. By peering around a thicket they could see the strangers.

"Still there," breathed Juk.

"Of course," said Awal. "I heard the horses wrenching grass, while we were still creeping up. Hear?"

"Yes."

Juk could smell the horses, and also see them. There was a herd of them, shaggy brown-colored animals as tall as a man is tall from his feet to his hip bones. Hair grew down over their eyes, and their manes were long and tangled with burrs. They were grazing some distance from the camp, several men on guard near them.

"It is strange," murmured Awal. "Why do the horses stay there? I should think they would run away."

"As they do from us, whenever we chase them," added Juk. "Perhaps they are weary and can run no more."

"Those horses are not weary," said Awal, regarding them with a practiced eye. "I think the strangers have used magic against them, holding them as demons hold a man in his sleep, not letting him go, no matter how hard he struggles. It is amazing, no less."

"Watch," whispered Juk. "They may yet run away."

Perhaps so. The horses seemed to have grown uneasy. Several of them threw up their heads and snorted loudly, gazing wild-eyed in all directions. Others took alarm at this, and in another moment the entire herd was restless. The leader of the band was apparently an old mare, a colt trotting beside her; suddenly this leader sprang forward as if to flee.

Yet she did not. No sooner had she leaped than a man ran forward, stopped short, and extended his arms as a bar to her going. Swiftly the mare whirled and lurched back to the herd, to wrench grass as though nothing had happened. The band of horses quieted down, the watching herders took their ease again.

"Now we have truly seen magic," said Awal. "It must be that a man spreading his arms like that is a sign from powerful spirits, and the horses dare not defy it."

Juk's eyes were glowing with the pleasure of a new discovery. "You are wrong," he told his friend. "The spreading of arms surely helped, but the thongs also helped."

"Thongs?"

"The mare's forefeet are tied with leathern cords," Juk explained. "I saw them when she sprang. Her gait was awkward, not free but checked; then I noticed the

thong. That is how it is done: the strangers caught the lead mare and tied her feet, and since she cannot flee the others of the herd stay instead of running off."

"Ho ho, then they are taming these horses!" said Awal, in surprise.

That was it. The boys had hit upon a phenomenon new to them, yet already destined to spread throughout the world: the taming and domestication of animals. In some countries people first gathered up goats or sheep; in other regions the first herds were of cattle; here in the land of Juk and Awal it chanced that horses came first. The creatures were good eating; long centuries before this the paleolithic hunters of Western Europe had chased the wild horse, slaying him and devouring his flesh; in time some primitive genius had suggested the easier method of following a horse herd, getting it used to the sight of human beings, catching a leader, and hobbling a leader, and taking toll of the animals when meat was needed and there was no other game handy to their weapons. In this present instance the horses were still more wild than tame, and Man was a horse-follower rather than a horse-driver; nevertheless the important process had begun, and Juk and Awal were witnesses to it. Awal especially was excited; Juk soon put his mind to other things.

"Yes, the strangers are clever," said the young flint

chipper. "I wonder what their tools and weapons are like."

"Like ours," declared Awal.

"It is possible that they are better," answered Juk. "These people are from the south, and though I am young I have already seen better tools and weapons come from that direction."

Juk was right. His view of the world was brief and limited, yet in what he had just said he touched upon something even more fundamental than the taming of animals. For untold ages the migration of peoples was from Asia into Europe, west through such natural passageways as the valley of the Danube, and thence spreading as far afield as Britain. How did they get across the English Channel? In the beginning, and long thereafter, they walked; for there was no channel of water between the Continent and England. Instead there was a great wide plain, the Thames River a tributary of the Rhine, and the Rhine in turn emptying into the far-off Arctic Sea. Later there were profound geologic changes, land sinking and letting the sea flow between Britain and the Continent, land rising again to join the two, the ice ages waxing and waning, climate changing, a procession of varying beasts passing in life and death. Hippopotamuses sported in the Thames River, the saber-toothed tiger snarled his way among English

hills, the rhinoceros crashed through just such thickets as the one which Juk and Awal were today hiding behind. Changes and more changes, paleolithic men mastering fire and the art of making primitive weapons; the more formidable beasts perishing, the hills and valleys taking on an almost modern look, the sea once more creeping in between England and the rest of Europe. From then on England was an island, and all future emigrants from the mainland must wait until they learned how to row boats across the gap. Meantime, however, there were many scattered and diverse groups of people already in Britain, and some of these were little by little working north, to come in contact with earlier migrants. The strangers here with the wild-horse herd were the descendants of an earlier people. In general, the later arrivals were the more clever, and Juk thought all their tools and weapons must on that account be better.

"Hark!" he said. "Some of them are chopping down a tree."

"Between here and their camp," nodded Awal. "No matter, we are well hidden."

Juk was not thinking of that, but of the sound of the hatchets. There were two of them, and they seemed to be making short work of the tree. Soon there was a crash, and after that the stone hatchets lopped off all

the branches. This had taken place out of sight of Juk and his friend, but now the boys saw what was going on. Two of the strangers were dragging the tree to the edge of the camp, not far from where the women tended a fire.

"Fuel," said Juk.

"Ho, what are they doing!" exclaimed Awal, for the strangers had dragged the log past the fire and were rolling it into the pond. "It will not burn if they wet it like that!"

The strangers, however, did not intend to burn the log. It was to serve as a kind of raft, a kind of canoe. One of the tree-choppers laughed and sat down to watch, the other took a harpoon and straddled the log.

"The one on the log will spear fish!" gasped Awal. "Now there is true cleverness, excelling anything an ant can do, an ant or a nest-building bird, or even—or even—"

"Or even a man of the tribe of Karakaa," chuckled his friend. "You are right, Awal. This one is doing what we have been too stupid to do, too stupid and also afraid."

"Why not afraid?" demanded Awal. "There are evil demons in the pond. We have seen them shining up at us. This fisherman will be caught and dragged down."

The harpooner had thrust his weapon into his belt

and was bending down to paddle with his hands. He was taking it all in fun, laughter issuing from him like echoes from a cave. Juk peered at him, surprised to see that the stranger on the log was no more than a youth, perhaps the same age as Juk himself, or at least no older than Awal.

"The demons of the pond will pull him down," said Awal confidently. "It is not meant for people to venture upon the water like that. Goort himself said it was folly."

"He is fishing," said Juk, paying no attention to this talk of demons. "Look, he jabs down!"

"And gets nothing!"

The fisherman moved his log off a little way, then let it drift while he gazed down into the water. They saw him thrust down again, and a third time, and yet again, and the last time he brought up a shining fish of almost the length of his forearm. He held it up, shouting with glee, and the strangers on shore shouted back to him, urging him to catch more fish.

"Clever, clever," murmured Juk.

"And no demon drags him down," said Awal, with a trace of disappointment in his voice. "Perhaps the demons of the pond are asleep."

"Do demons sleep?" countered Juk. "I never heard of that. No, I believe that a fisherman on a log is safe

from them. Probably the spirit of the wood protects him. . . . Listen."

Awal waited a moment. "What do you hear?" he asked.

"There was a sound behind us," whispered Juk. "We must watch against an attack. Some of the strangers may have slipped up and around us."

"We had better go see," said Awal.

They turned to crawl back slowly the way they had come, watching and listening. After a while they heard the faint noise of footsteps, whereupon they paused, rigid as sticks. There were people passing beyond a thicket. The boys stared, then suddenly they grinned, relief in their eyes.

"Karakaa and the others," said Awal, and he raised his voice a little. "Ho!" he exclaimed.

Like startled animals the chief and his companions whirled round, spears ready to throw. They had taken the boys for enemies.

"Keep your spears!" said Juk quickly.

"Come forward," grunted the chief. "What are you doing here?"

"We have spied upon the strangers," said Awal.

"You should have stayed at the cave," frowned Goort the wizard. "You are too bold. It will make trouble for you."

"So far not," replied Awal.

"I have warned you," said the wizard resentfully.

Karakaa made a gesture of impatience. "Let go such chatter," he said. "What is important is our plan against the strangers."

"We have no plan," said Nashad.

"Then we must have one," declared the chief. "There are too many of them."

"Are there more of them than of us?" asked Juk.

The chief hesitated. He did not know. Neither he nor any of his tribe could count; they rarely had anything which demanded counting, and this had helped to keep them from learning the art of enumerating things. If there were few things they referred to them as being numerous as the fingers on a hand, or perhaps two hands; but beyond that, things were simply "many," or sometimes "many many."

"There are enough of them," replied Karakaa at length. "Also they have good weapons."

"No," said Nashad. "They have stone hatchets like our own, but only a few have spears."

"Each of them carries a kind of magical little stick, slung upon his back," murmured Goort. "I am afraid of that."

"A magical stick?" said Karakaa. "It is to slay birds with, and nothing else. Juk, where are you going?"

Juk had slipped round the thicket and was craning back toward the valley. He turned to whisper loudly:

"I go nowhere. I only looked, and saw something. Come here."

His companion came up, squinting toward the camp of the strangers. A number of women were digging in the earth.

"Looking for roots?" inquired Awal.

"The ground is bare at that place," objected Goort.

"I understand their purpose," said Nashad slowly. "They are digging a great hole, and such a hole is surely for the purpose of storing food. We have done the same thing when we have had good luck in the chase and there was more meat than we could eat. These strangers are about to slay some of their horses, and put part of the meat into a cache, the hole lined with branches and dry leaves to keep it from spoiling too much."

This was not the purpose of the pit the strangers were digging, but Karakaa considered that Nashad had explained the thing with clearness and truth. He nodded assent, adding:

"Such a thing means that they expect to stay here."

"And make trouble," said the wizard.

"They will stay," declared Nashad. "The head of this valley is a good place for horses. There is grazing

and water, and yet the ground is open, so that the strangers can watch the creatures against enemies."

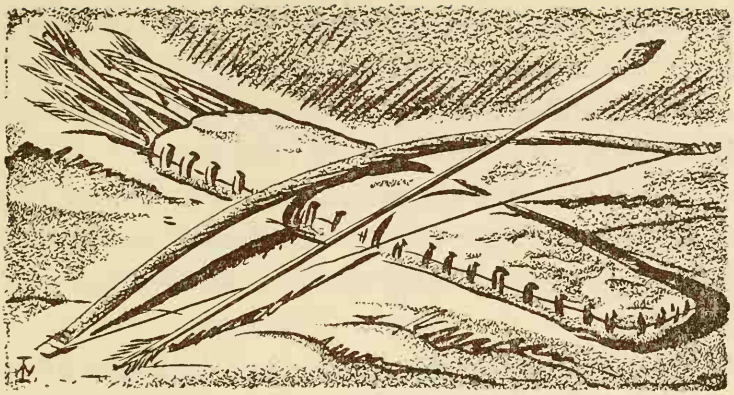
Juk saw the muscles at Karakaa's jaw tighten and grow hard.

"All this upper valley is our hunting range," said the chief. "These strangers are too close. They must be driven away."

"Now?" said Awal. "Today?"

"Tomorrow," answered the chief. "Unless they leave before then."

But they did not. When the next day came the strangers were still camped by the pond. There was trouble ahead.



CHAPTER III

Decoy

BIG FOOT had killed a deer the evening before, and now in the cool gray dawn the Hunting People crouched round it and ate their fill. Most times they would have rejoiced over such good meat, and so much of it, but today they were worried. They must get rid of the strangers in the valley below, and no one knew just how to do it.

"There is only one way," declared Awal. "Let us go against them while there is still concealing mist in the air, and when they open their eyes to see what the world

is like we shall fall upon them with spears and stone hatchets, and that will be the end of them."

"Yes," nodded Juk. "If we are to fight them let us do it openly. Awal has told the right way."

The right way for hot, impetuous youth, perhaps, but not for the older men. Hunters like Karakaa and Nashad shook their heads, looking grave. And Big Foot said plainly:

"I myself spoke in this fashion, long long ago; but I have learned to go more cautiously in fighting."

"The strangers are only men," insisted Awal.

"Ah, yes," said Goort the wizard, "yet sometimes in the forest a careless hand will pick up a crooked stick and the stick turns out to be a snake. The strangers are queer people. They venture out upon ponds, a log between their legs. Wild horses submit to them. Instead of spears, many of them carry magical little sticks. People like that are dangerous people."

"Listen," said Talker all at once.

"Say what is in you," invited Nashad.

"It is not what is in me, but in that jackal," murmured the old man. "Hear him!"

The Hunting People gave ear. Somewhere to the southeast there was barking, and from the sound it was not a wolf but one of those related creatures known as jackals.

"That jackal is alone, and barks standing still, not running," said Big Foot.

"Near the strangers and their camp," added Karakaa.

"More queerness," said the wizard. "The jackal is perhaps warning them, for people like that are always in league with demons; and as everybody knows, jackals have evil in them. No, we must not fight the strangers openly, but with craft."

Awal made a face to show his disappointment, but the older men nodded agreement. Then the chief of the tribe said to Talker:

"You are old and have seen many things. Tell us how we are to trick the strangers into our hand, so that we can slay many and frighten the others out of the region that is ours, not theirs."

Talker hastily swallowed a bit of deer meat, for he loved such invitations as this of Karakaa, and he did not mean eating to stand in his way.

"Yes, I am old," he admitted. "I have seen much that was marvelous. When I was young these trees were little shoots; and when I was born the moon itself was so small that it had to stay close to its mother the sun, out of fear and weakness; and when I was learning to walk the stars themselves were sprouting legs, so that by night they could escape the demons of the dank foggy earth by clambering up the side of the sky."

"Did you help them clamber there?" said Awal slyly, for he often wearied of the old man's chatter, and this seemed to him no time for such a thing.

"Be still," said Goort, with a stern face.

"Good advice," Juk whispered in Awal's ear; "but just the same the wizard dislikes Talker's tales as much as you, because they hint at magical events and thus attack Goort's powers over such things. Hark now!"

Talker was explaining a plan.

"Cunning is what we need," he said; "cunning and craft. Let us tempt the strangers into the hills by means of a decoy. They are valley people and hence will be like deep-swimming fish in shallow water, at our mercy. By ruse we can lure them into a ravine and fall upon them from ambush."

"Taking them unawares," smiled Karakaa. "It is a good plan."

"How decoy them?" asked Awal.

"By the call of some animal," said Big Foot. "A bear, perhaps. They will come to hunt it, and then—"

"Not a bear," objected Nashad. "Many people prefer to leave bears alone, out of respect for their ripping claws. A deer might serve, but a deer makes no far-carrying sound."

"What of wild cattle?" put in Juk.

"That is better," said the chief, then he laughed softly.

"Better, yes; but better still will be the cry of a wild horse! These strangers like horses. If they hear neighing they will think their herd had drawn its kind, and they will come to catch the new ones, thinking to add them to what they already have."

"Either they will think that," agreed Nashad, "or they will fear the wild horses will tempt their herd into the hills. One way or the other, the strangers will answer to the horse-neighing which we know how to make. Let us go at once."

The men rose and took their weapons, Karakaa saying to the women in stern, commanding tones:

"Make no fire, lest it be seen or smelled out. Keep the children from noise, so that their yapping will not betray the whereabouts of our cave. See that you obey, for soon the strangers will be pushing this way, and though we lure them in another direction there is no telling where some of them may wander."

There was no answer from the women. Ho, why should there be! Women in that day were sorry creatures, with scarcely a glimmer of the power and splendor and intelligent influence they were to exhibit in later ages. They rarely talked back to chiefs like Karakaa; they merely listened, looked meek, and obeyed. The women watched, the men trailed off into the misty forest. Then Karakaa paused and faced his warriors.

"All but two of us shall pass to the ravine which leads up out of the valley to the northwest. There we shall give the cry of the wild horse, and the strangers, hearing it, will follow it into the hills in a direction which is not the direction of our cave. You will all come with me, save Awal and Juk; and these two will station themselves on the slope of the ravine where we want the strangers to come."

"Juk and I are to stand between the rest of you and the strangers," said Awal quickly. "We are to see if they come, and when they do we are to signal you."

"You speak out of turn," frowned the wizard.

"He does, but in this case he speaks well," shrugged the chief. "This is fighting time, not quarreling time. Go, Awal, and take Juk with you. Signal us by giving the call of the cuckoo bird."

"We know how," said Juk.

That was all. Karakaa motioned for his men to follow him; he went off at an angle, and the boys kept on to the west, climbing brief wooded slopes and scrambling down into vine-choked hollows. In a little time they reached the spot where they were to wait for the strangers to appear. A deep ravine lay before them, firs darkening it, white-barked birches standing in its mist like ghosts, the ash trees weaving a trembling screen of new leaves. Juk and Awal squatted down by a boulder.

The world was very still, and the wraiths of fog Juk found gloomy, so that he said:

"At the mouth of this ravine there is a valley, and in the valley there are people. It is better so."

"What?" exclaimed Awal in surprise.

"Yes; it makes the land less empty, less lonely. The sight and movement and smell of people is a good thing."

"Ah, but these people are enemies!"

"That is true," admitted Juk, "and still I . . ."

"And still you what?"

"I—I should like to see that boy again," said the Flint Chipper in a hesitating voice. "The one who straddled the log and fished in the pond. That would be pleasant, to see him."

Awal stared at his friend. He could not understand such talk. Pleasant to see a stranger? Why, it was as bad as wanting to explore the den of a grizzly bear, one of those huge beasts now and then to be seen in the English hills.

"Pleasant, huh!" said Awal, and grinned. "Well, we shall see him again, the log-straddling fish-harpooner and the rest of his kind, and we shall slay them. The time to trust strangers is when they are dead, not before."

"I hear something," Juk murmured.

"No," said Awal. "It is not yet time for Karakaa and the others to start signaling."

"I hear no false horse-neighing," answered Juk; "I hear the noise that wild cats make. One is slinking down the ravine, or I have no wit."

"You sometimes have wit," said Awal dryly; "so perhaps you are right. Karakaa's party could have frightened a cat, and the creature is slipping off this way."

"Toward the horse herd," observed Juk. "That is bad."

"Why bad?"

"Because if the strangers see or hear the cat they will be decoyed to it, not to our ambush. Wild cats like horse meat, and the people will think to protect their herd against the beast, thus ignoring Karakaa's false calling."

Awal pursed his lips. Perhaps his friend was right. A wild cat is not the greatest of enemies, but it is enough to frighten horses, and even stampede them and run along behind and pull down a colt. Quickly Awal rose, Juk beside him.

"We had better see," said the Flint Chipper.

Grasping their spears, they descended the steep slope into the ravine. There was still mist at the bottom, and many bushes, and a crooked trail to be examined for tracks. The boys lay down and smelled it, and rose up puzzled. No tracks, no odor. They peered at the damp ground, and found no sign that a cat had passed.

"We are in time," whispered Awal, rising to his feet. "The thing is still up the ravine. Ho ho!"

The cat was up the ravine, true enough, but not far. Its eyes were shining at them through the thin mist, and before the boys could recover from their surprise they saw a second pair of eyes slightly behind the others.

"Two of them," muttered Juk. "A pair, hunting together. This would surely have kept the strangers busy, defending their horses."

"We must drive them back," said Awal; "but take care that we do not step in the trail, lest the strangers see our tracks, when they come. I will try to get the cats out of the path."

A low snarling came from the cats, but they showed no signs of fear. Why should they! In our modern and man-mastered world a hunter is dreaded by most beasts; they have learned to suspect him of the deadly magic of firearms, from which flight is the only refuge. Back in the stone age, on the contrary, Man was not so alarming; he was weaker, less sure of himself, and so poorly armed that very often his contests with four-footed foes were equal contests, rather than the one-sided affairs of today. Thus the cats stood their ground, seeing no reason why they should flee in terror, or, for that matter, flee at all. Awal threw a stone and the cats sprang out of the path, but that was all.

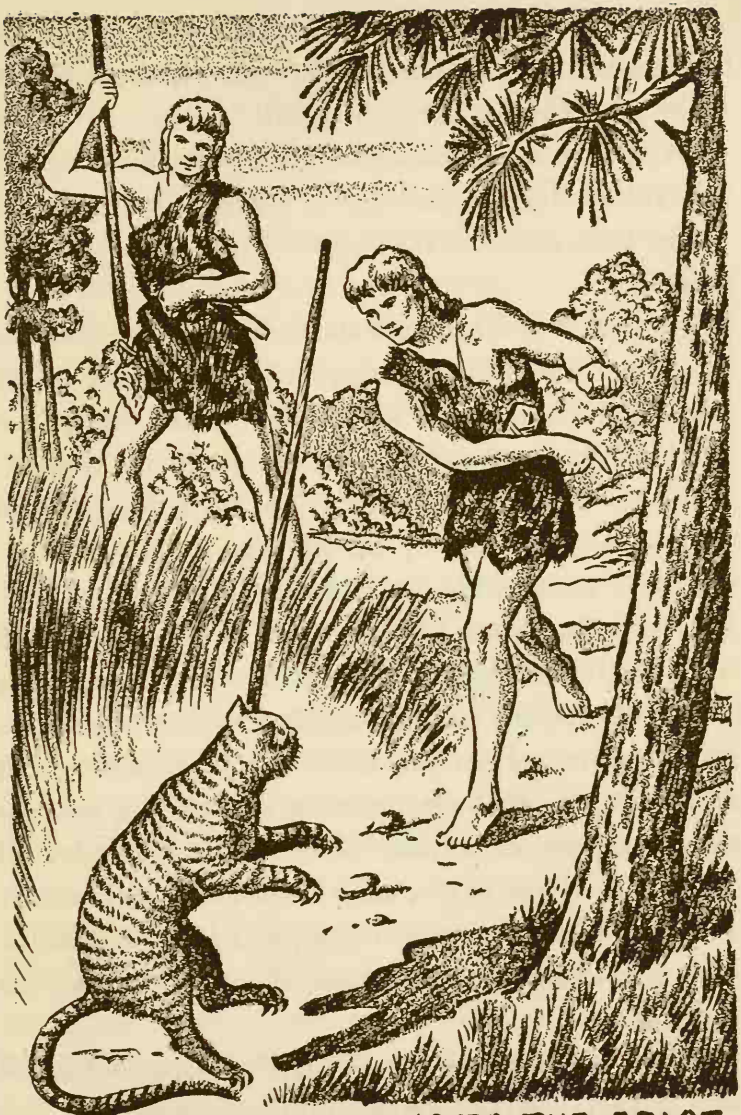
"It is enough," declared Juk. "We can give them blows where they stand, and no trace of it will appear in the trail."

"Blows that will be spear thrusts," added Awal, and began to advance.

The cats circled back into the brush a little, the male openly defiant, the female more timid but also more treacherous. With eyes gleaming and lips curling back, she went slinking from one thicket to another, as if to get behind the boys and attack from the rear. Juk and Awal watched her, and kept on towards the male, spears lifted and ready.

"Quick, he is about to spring!" exclaimed Juk.

The Flint Chipper drew back with his weapon, and then brought it sharply forward, letting go the shaft with a forceful jerk. The spear struck the cat at the base of the neck near the shoulder bone; the creature sprang snarling to attack, whereupon Awal stepped to one side and gave it a thrust in the ribs. Juk's spear had clung to the beast and the boy had accordingly drawn his stone hatchet as a second weapon, but the cat appeared to have had enough. Awal had struck and pulled his spear away for another blow; the wild cat sprang aside and got into a patch of brush, where Juk's spear was quickly jerked free. Juk ran to get it, saw the female, and cast his weapon at her. He missed, yet she had



JUK'S SPEAR HAD CLUNG TO THE BEAST.

taken fright at what had happened to her mate, and was fleeing up the western slope of the ravine with him.

"A good ending," grinned Awal.

"Yes, they will be out of the way of the strangers," said Juk, feeling of the edge of his spearhead to see if it had been dulled. "Now what is the matter? More cats?"

"No," said Awal, with a startled face; "but Karakaa or another is signaling. Perhaps it has been going on for a while, and because we were busy with the cats we did not hear. Let us get out of this ravine, to our station."

Hastily they scrambled up the western slope, fearful of being seen or heard by the strangers from the valley. The boys found a big flat rock and squatted down behind it, stilling their labored breath and listening hard. The sound of a neighing horse rose on the air, quavering and shrill. It came from the upper reaches of the ravine, and when it had stopped there was an answering call from a slightly different direction, this replying note the softer whinny of a colt. The Hunting People had thought it unwise to give out a single call, lest it be considered unnatural; a mare calling to a lost colt and the colt whinnying for its mother—that was better, less suspicious.

"Sh-h, the strangers are coming!" whispered Juk, all of a sudden. "Make sure they do not see you."

"I know enough for that," Awal grunted back at him.

How long the false horses had been neighing neither Juk nor Awal could have said, but certainly it had been going on long enough for the strangers to respond to it. A file of men had appeared down the ravine. They were coming to track the "horses," thinking to add them to their herd. Juk and Awal lifted up a bit, peering down through the bushes at them. It was hard to see well. There were perhaps as many of them as there were men in Karakaa's party, and they were black-headed and clad in hides; that was all that the boys were sure of. Then the leader halted, and all the men behind him halted.

"The neighing moved west, now it swings around to the north again," said this leader.

"The colt is still east of the mare," said another.

"My say is that they are coming together straight up the ravine from here," observed a third man. "If we thrust in between them we can catch the colt as it flounders in the brush, and the mare will follow us where we will."

"Forward," said the leader briefly.

The file of men passed on, Juk and Awal lifting up to see better. Third from the end of the procession strode the very youth they had seen before, the one who had ventured out upon the log, and fished in the pond with

his harpoon. Awal nudged the Flint Chipper, and Juk gave a nod; he saw the boy.

"Out of sight," murmured Awal presently. "It is time we signaled to Karakaa."

"Yes," said Juk, and showed no more interest in the matter; he was thinking of the strange boy, and how this one, too, would probably be slain in ambush. It did not please Juk to think that.

Awal stood erect, made sure the file of men had really gone out of sight, and gave a bright, clear whistle. It was a bird call, the two-syllabled whistle which was one day to provide the feathered originator with the name of "cuckoo." Karakaa and the others would hear the imitation and know that the strangers were advancing into the trap. The horse hunters would keep on up the ravine, until, unbeknownst to them, their enemies would spring upon them from all sides, striking death blows with spears and hatchets. Juk frowned to see Awal about to call again.

"Enough," said the Flint Chipper. "Let us go on, and call from a nearer distance."

They made their way halfway down the slope and began to follow along the hillside, taking the usual pains not to make noise. There was no sound of the strangers, and after a while Awal paused, intending to call again. But suddenly Juk pulled him back.

"Silence," whispered the Flint Chipper. "Look where I point!"

It was the log-straddling youth, as Juk and Awal called him. He had fallen behind his companions, evidently to stalk some kind of game.

"Perhaps one of the wild cats," murmured Awal.

Juk did not hear. He was absorbed in the young stranger, for now he was closer and in plainer view than upon the two previous occasions that Juk had observed him. Like Juk and Awal, he wore nothing on his head and nothing on his feet, but he was clad in some hide that was not deerhide. It appeared to be the tanned skin of a horse, as if the strangers took toll of their herd not only for meat but also for clothing. Some kind of bracelet was worn on either wrist, and his black hair had been hacked off at the nape of the neck, to make it shorter. As for his face, this was hidden, because the thing he stalked was up the ravine and Juk and Awal were behind him. One step at a time the young stranger crept forward, but Awal was puzzled to know what sort of weapon he had.

"It is no spear," he said, "and no club or hatchet."

Suddenly the hunter let fly: his right elbow jerked back, a small slender stick darted into a clump of grass. He gave a little cry of triumph and dashed up to the grass, lifting from it a cock grouse, mottled gray and

brown in color. The "stick" had pierced the bird, and at once Juk knew what sort of weapon the stranger had.

"That is what Goort thought a magical stick," whispered the excited Juk, "and Karakaa thought it a thing to throw at birds and kill them; and both of them were wrong, but Karakaa was nearest the truth. It is an arrow, and it was shot from a bow!"

"Bow and arrow?" said Awal, wrinkling his brow. "Why, it is not possible."

"What is not possible?" demanded Juk.

"To kill grouse with such a thing. Juk, we have seen people with bow and arrow before now, and such people have shot at us and always missed. It is a senseless weapon."

"Not this one, because it went to the mark," objected the Flint Chipper. "Look, he is going on, seeking another grouse, perhaps."

The stranger had tucked the neck of his first bird into his belt and was going leisurely on up the ravine, bow and arrow ready. Juk could restrain himself no longer. He was passionately fond of weapons and tools; indeed he was deeply interested in all manner of doing or making things. The bow and arrow intrigued him; he wanted to see more of this remarkable weapon. Slung down at the young stranger's left side there was a long narrow pouch, and from this projected the tips of many

arrows. The bow was of bent wood, slender and yet powerful, with probably a sinew of animal tendon tied from end to end. It was all fascinating to Juk, but Awal scoffed.

"It is no weapon for a man," said Awal.

"There are good daggers and poor daggers," answered Juk, starting on up the ravine behind the disappearing hunter; "and likewise there must be bows and arrows which are good and other bows and arrows which are poor. The ones we have seen among the hill people were poor, but these strangers certainly have good ones."

"Foolishness!"

"No; sense," said Juk. "Look you! Here are people who do clever things, taking horses and knowing how to ride upon the surface of ponds. Most of them carry no spears, but rely upon stone hatchets and the bow and arrow."

"Which proves they are stupid," said Awal.

"Which proves they know what they do," retorted Juk. "Clever people do not venture badly armed into the forest. The strangers come with bow and arrow, therefore it is a good weapon. Ha, where is the boy gone?"

They stopped to peer and listen. The stranger was a double stone's throw ahead, and once more he appeared to be stalking game. Juk watched him, a plan forming

in his mind. Gradually the boy with the bow and arrows moved off to the right, then Juk spoke.

"He goes toward a side ravine that we know!" said the Flint Chipper.

"What of that?" answered Awal. "I am going to give the cuckoo call again. It is time."

"Give it," said Juk strangely, "and when you have done the thing I shall tell you something."

Awal gave the cuckoo signal, Juk scarcely waiting for him to finish before he said, his eyes shining with excitement:

"Listen! The young stranger there has arrows that I need. A bow I think I could make, but there is cunning in the arrows, lest they go crookedly. Awal, we must get some of those arrows to copy from, as many as possible, but at least one. Yes, and we must get it from the grouse hunter yonder—*now,* before he joins the party he has left for a while of stalking game."

CHAPTER IV

"I Am Ranta"

AWAL stared at his friend a moment, but no more. He nodded his shaggy head, laughing:

"I will do it!"

They set out in slow pursuit of the strange youth, Awal thinking only of adventure, Juk intent upon the precious arrows.

"If we can get one of them," he murmured, "we shall have a new weapon."

"Out of one arrow?" demanded Awal.

"Yes. It will be this way. I shall make more arrows

like the first, and you, in your turn, can make bows to shoot them with. A new weapon!"

"You spin tales like Talker himself," scoffed Awal. "Wait, your arrow-man has disappeared! Now what will you do?"

"Track him," said Juk, and bent down to look for footprints.

There were few tracks, but Juk and his friend had no need of many. They were skilled in following animals through the forest, or even across the grassy moors and thicket-grown hillsides, and so far as a trail was concerned there was little difference between four-foots and two-foots. Men were heavy, and on moist ground like this they could scarcely avoid leaving a mark of some kind. Juk found the rounded imprint of the stranger's heel, and farther on there were the small close-together marks made by his bare toes. On went the boys, but soon Awal was pessimistic. Their quarry had leaped far to one side, as his tracks showed clearly.

"He knows we are following him," declared Awal, "and hence he tries to lose us."

"Perhaps not," said Juk. "It can be that he leaped aside to keep from being seen by some enemy of claw and fang. And no matter: he has *not* lost us. Here is the trail again!"

Juk was confident of being able to follow wherever

the stranger led, yet it was not long before the young flint chipper was sorely puzzled, and Awal with him. The ravine had again divided, one fork going to the left, one to the right. There were no tracks in either fork. The boys hunted up and down, shook their heads in bewilderment, and came to stand at the spot where the forks began, wondering which way to go. Then some instinct worked in Juk; he had an unexplainable but definite feeling that the stranger was close at hand.

"He is hiding near," whispered Juk. "Let us get to cover."

Even as Juk said this there was an ominous sound. At the point where the ravine separated into two forks there was a low abrupt wall of limestone, a miniature cliff which towered over Juk and Awal. Someone was atop that little cliff, and he was dislodging a rock. The missile came hurtling down toward the ravine, crashing through some wiry bushes and bounding on toward the boys.

"Look out!" cried Juk, and sprang back out of the way.

Awal likewise sprang away, but less quickly than Juk. The rock hit, careened to one side, and struck Awal a glancing blow as it passed. In another eyewink the boys were out of harm's way, Juk unscathed, Awal nursing a bruised left shoulder.

"Who was it?" growled Awal.

"The stranger," said Juk, craning to see the top of the cliff. "And he is still there. I see now. He knew we were following him, and so he clambered on top of that cliff, content to hide until I suspected him, and then he cast down his rock. Your shoulder is not hurt, is it?"

Juk felt his friend's shoulder as he said this, and Awal promptly let out a howl of pain. Whereupon there was a laugh from the cliff top.

"Birds sing, and wolves howl!" exclaimed a voice.

"May the demons of black night seize him," muttered Awal, rubbing his hurt. "May they seize him and pull him apart, and afterward put him together again so that they can once more give him pain by pulling him apart! When I get back I shall ask Goort to send a killing spell upon this rock-throwing rascal."

"Ho ho!" laughed the stranger on the cliff. "You do not like rocks?"

"Who are you?" called Juk.

"I am Ranta," was the answer; "but *your* names I will not ask, because wolves have no names, jackals have none, wild dogs have none. Ho ho, he he!"

Awal gritted his teeth. "If we get hold of you," he cried, "you will learn that wild dogs have teeth!"

"I see that from here," was the retort, "because one wild dog is snarling at me!"

This still further enraged Awal, but Juk bade him be silent. The Flint Chipper had a plan. After all, they were not here to exchange insults, but to get an arrow. Therefore Juk called to the youth on the cliffs:

"Then your bow and arrow is only for birds!"

"What mean you?" demanded Ranta.

"Why, you shoot a grouse with your weapon, but instead of shooting an arrow at *us* you cast down a rock."

"Arrows are too valuable to waste on wild dogs," Ranta replied.

There was a bellow of rage from Awal. He was bold and there was temper inside him; talk of this kind stung him like so many bees—he could not bear it. Seizing his spear, he sprang out of the bushes where he had taken refuge with Juk, and darted toward the foot of the cliff, crying to his friend:

"Come! We can scale it and take him!"

Juk hesitated, then Ranta decided the matter. The youth on the cliff dislodged a second rock, and Awal retreated. The rock bounded down, missing them, but giving Ranta plenty of time to flee. When Juk and Awal looked up again he was gone.

"A trickster!" grumbled Awal.

"He is clever," Juk smiled. "Now what to do? Do you want to give up?"

"Not Awal," was the answer. "He has hurt my shoulder, and I am athirst to get even with him."

"And I am athirst for that arrow," said Juk. "Let us take after him again, but this time with more caution. Look, this is how it is: he is upon a kind of ridge, a ravine on either side of him. You take one ravine, I will take the other. He will be somewhere between us, and one of us ought to find him. Whoever sees tracks, or the arrow-shooter himself, let that one signal, and the other of us will come help. Choose the signal, Awal, since you are better at such things than I am."

"The call of a marmot," said Awal. "Listen hard, because I think I shall be the one to find him. I am going to the left, because his companions are in that direction and he will probably try to get to them."

"I will take the right-hand fork," agreed Juk. "Does your shoulder hurt?"

"Less than his head will hurt when I catch him," said Awal. "Remember—the marmot call."

"Yes."

They parted, Awal hurrying up the left fork of the ravine, Juk going to the right. Awal had chosen the more promising route, yet it was Juk who was destined to have the luck, if luck it could be called. Carefully the Flint Chipper strode along the ravine, listening for telltale sounds, and playing his eyes back and forth

upon the ground immediately ahead of him. There was what might be called an intermittent trail, sometimes fairly clear and open, at other times concealed or broken by stretches of dwarf juniper. Once he saw tracks which told him a doe and her fawn had been along here, but though ordinarily that would have interested him, today it did not. Juk was after other game.

"An arrow, an arrow," he kept murmuring. "I must have one of those arrows; and from that one . . ."

He left off speaking. There had been a sound off to his left. Now it came again, the unmistakable call of a marmot, querulous and complaining, and yet defiant.

"Awal is signaling me," thought the Flint Chipper. "He has found Ranta's trail, or perhaps Ranta himself."

Hastily Juk started to clamber up the slope, grasping bushes and scrambling up over stones and tree roots. The hillside leaned back, easier and easier to climb, until presently it was almost a plateau. Brush and occasional trees dotted it, little gullies cut it here and there, and there were many game trails, most of them old. Juk slowed down. Which way now? There was no telling, because the "marmot" had not called a second time. Perhaps something had happened to Awal. He was rash, and the injury to his shoulder had inflamed him against the stranger; it was possible that Ranta had done more than bruise him this time.

Suddenly Juk heard the marmot again. It was surprisingly close, and somehow it did not sound quite right. The boy crept on through the brush, cautious as a wild animal.

Then a small brown shape scuttled away from him, paused for a brief moment, and vanished down a hole.

It was a marmot, and the calls which Juk had heard had come from the animal itself, and not from Awal at all. Juk sighed with disappointment, and yet he was also relieved. At least Awal had not found the stranger, and that meant that Ranta had not been hurt or killed. The Flint Chipper could hardly have explained it, even to his inner self, but he did not want Ranta to be slain.

The marmot peered out of its hole, squeaked and darted back into the earth. Juk shook away his revery. What should he do—go back to the right-hand fork of the ravine, or try to find Awal?

"I will keep on across this plateau," he decided; "west, but a little north. I may find something."

He did. Scarcely had he gone the distance that a spear can be thrown, when he heard a new sound. It was no bird or animal call, but a scraping noise. The boy halted. What was it? The sound was irregular, but although it stopped at intervals it always resumed, and in a way that suggested persistence. There was some strong desire behind that scraping noise, and strong desire smacked

more of human than of animal purpose. Juk was certain of this; also, there was something about the sound which hinted at caution.

"Surely it is Ranta," thought Juk. "He is making that noise, and afraid lest he be heard."

Juk got down on his hands and knees, so that the bushes would hide him. He began to advance toward the sound, puzzled to know what it meant. One thing was certain: Ranta had killed no game that required skinning, because the noise was harsher than the pull of a knife upon fresh hide. Was the stranger scraping bone? No, not bone. It sounded more like stone upon stone.

"Perhaps there is a vein of flint on this ridge," thought Juk. "The mine which our tribe uses is further in the hills, but here there may be the beginning of a new one; and Ranta is gathering pieces to take to his camp."

There was a big gray beech tree just ahead of Juk, and at the juncture of two limbs a hole. A squirrel darted out of this hole, chattering in a low inquiring tone, with its beady eyes fixed upon the boy. The creature wanted to know where he was going, and what he was up to; and if he alarmed it the squirrel would let out a warning note which would put Ranta on guard. Juk halted, gazing calmly and steadily at the squirrel, and waiting. The bright little eyes watched him expectantly, but when time passed and Juk did nothing,

the creature relaxed its vigilance; it jerked its tail, made a nervous scampering sound on the bark of the tree, and ran back into its hole.

"It is good," whispered Juk, and crept on.

Ranta was not far off. The scraping sound was by this time quite distinct, and Juk could even hear the young stranger clear his throat occasionally. The bushes gave way to a small upland meadow, grass knee-high, but nothing else to obscure the view. Juk crept to the edge of this meadow, and paused.

"I was right," he murmured.

The log-straddler, the arrow-shooter, was in the center of the meadow, bent over a flattish rock of some sort. He had drawn a stone knife of perhaps the length of his hand, and was scraping at the rock, though for what purpose Juk did not yet know. Ranta worked cautiously, scraping a while and then glancing about in search of enemies. That was the custom of all primitive peoples; they must never for an instant forget that life was hazardous, and that danger and even death might descend upon them at any moment. Constant watchfulness was the price of safety in that day, and although Ranta perhaps expected to see nothing when he glanced about, he looked nevertheless.

Then suddenly he did see something; he saw Juk, crouching at the edge of the grass-grown meadow.

Ranta did not flee. His limbs jerked spasmodically, but that was no more than automatic reaction. No, he did not flee, but whirled round with his back to the rock, one hand upon his bow, the other grasping his stone knife. There was red on the tip of the knife, and this told Juk what the stranger had been doing: he had been scraping up bits of the red ocher which occurs in certain iron ores. Savages and even barbarians have use for this ocher, and accordingly Ranta had paused here to gather a chance find of it. Juk rose to his feet, uncertain as to how to proceed. The stranger was on guard, that much was certain.

"Who are you?" demanded Ranta.

"My name is Juk," was the answer.

"I know," said the arrow-shooter. "You were with the one who got in the way of my rock. Ho ho!"

The Flint Chipper did not answer. He held his spear lightly in his right hand, trying to decide whether to throw it or not. Then while he hesitated Ranta seemed to read his mind, for with a quick movement the stranger had an arrow out of his quiver. Out of his quiver, but not yet fitted to the bow; he was apparently not afraid of Juk, or at any rate he did not greatly fear him.

"You are alone?" asked Ranta.

"My friend is with me," Juk answered.

"If he were with you he would be in sight," was the

rejoinder. "You separated to look for me, and he has not yet come."

"He is near," said Juk, studying the youth before him.

"Will you call him?"

"Perhaps."

"You will need him," chuckled Ranta; "unless you turn tail and run from me."

Juk flushed. "Bow and arrows make you brave," he observed.

"No, not that," said Ranta; "but why should I fear people like you! I belong to the Beast Herders, and we are superior to your kind of men, especially in wits and clever ways of doing things."

The Flint Chipper was astonished, not so much by what Ranta had said as by his manner, the way in which he referred to his superiority. Ranta did not appear to boast; he spoke of it simply, confidently, as a matter of course.

"Your people are clever," said Juk strongly, "but my people are likewise clever."

"And you and your friend, are you two examples of this?" jeered the other.

"Perhaps we are," retorted Juk. "You Beast Herders keep horses, but there is no one in these hills who can rival my tribe as hunters, and we have better spears.

"Pah, you people are nothing! Hill tribes are always stupid."

"We are not a hill tribe," protested Juk. "There are brutish peoples further back in the hills, and they are ill-formed and ugly to see, but we despise them as much as you do, and we are not of them. Do *I* look like such a one?"

Ranta inspected him, a tantalizing little smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

"Your body is well-made," he admitted; "but your robe is a crude thing."

"How is it crude?" demanded the Flint Chipper. "It was taken from a reindeer, then tanned—"

"Partly tanned," broke in Ranta. "It is stiffer than it ought to be, and see how clumsily it is fastened!"

Juk glanced down at his robe. It was held together in front by means of leathern cords, and though there were gaps between the two sides of it, the boy had never considered this a drawback. He looked at Ranta, and saw that the stranger's robe showed no gaps, but fitted snugly down the chest, some sort of bone rings holding the two sides tightly together.

"Crude clothing, crude wits!" laughed Ranta. "You are stupid, and all your people are likewise stupid, although you are probably the worst of them!"

"Your tongue bites falsely," said Juk angrily. "I am

a flint chipper, and though I am young I am the best in our tribe, the best in all this region, because I have loved it and studied it greatly, where others only worked at it when they felt the mood."

"A chipper of flint, ho ho ho!" laughed Ranta, and this was too much for Juk to bear.

In a fury Juk seized his spear and drew back to throw, and in that same instant Ranta put an arrow to his bow and let fly with it. The arrow whistled across the meadow, Juk ducked and escaped it, then he sprang up and hurled his spear. And this also missed its mark. The boys had been on guard, too alert to be hit so easily.

"Another arrow?" cried Juk, as his enemy took a second one from his quiver. "We shall see!"

With a bound Juk was running across the meadow, so swift and unexpected that Ranta had no time to fit the arrow to the bow. Instead of trying to shoot a second time, therefore, he dropped his bow and drew his stone hatchet. A knife had a sharper edge, but altogether a hatchet was the better weapon at close range: it could cut and it could also stun, and break bones, unless bones kept out of the way. Ranta jerked out his hatchet and Juk drew his, then they rushed together. *The hatchets crashed against each other,* the enraged boys drew back and rushed again, Juk slugging down with all his strength, Ranta fending off the blow. Juk was not so

THE HATCHETS CRASHED AGAINST EACH OTHER

strong as the other, but he was more agile, and was able to strike oftener and more swiftly than the stranger. Suddenly Juk knocked Ranta's hatchet out of his hands; Ranta darted to retrieve it, Juk behind him.

"Ho, I am coming!" cried a voice.

With a startled face Juk whirled round, Ranta taking advantage of the interruption to snatch up his hatchet and thrust at Juk at close quarters. Juk turned back at him in time to block the blow with his left hand, and also to jerk his hatchet away from him. Boldly Ranta drew his knife and was tensing to spring to a new attack, when something seemed to change his mind. A quick look over his shoulder and he whirled and ran, catching up his bow and running across the clearing. At the edge he picked up a stone the size of his fist, took aim and threw it at Juk, striking him a glancing blow on the head and knocking him flat.

"Where is he?" cried a voice, and Awal floundered through the brush. "Is he gone, the coward?"

"He is gone," muttered Juk, struggling to his feet, "but he is no coward. We fought like men."

"Do men throw stones?"

"Sometimes. Ah! he left his hatchet behind; but his bow he took. Come, Awal, let us look for the arrow he shot at me, while I was at the edge of the clearing."

Juk led the way, confident of finding the arrow; but

it was nowhere to be found. A footprint told them why. Ranta had fled this way, finding the arrow and carrying it off with him, as something too valuable to lose. The Flint Chipper scowled ruefully, then he forgot the arrow. In his hand he held Ranta's hatchet, and it was in several ways different from his own.

"See!" exclaimed Juk, holding it up. "We lash our stone hatchet-heads to the wooden handles; this hatchet-head is shoved through a hole in the butt end of the handle, and at a certain point is wedged in and can go no farther! Clever!"

"Clever, but no better than our way," said Awal.

Juk was examining the head of Ranta's hatchet. Its essential form had been given it by chipping, but whereas the Hunting People relied solely upon chipping in such cases, the new hatchet showed signs of friction and rubbing. First it had been chipped, then it had been rubbed down or polished with another stone. The cutting edge especially had been ground by this method, so that it was not irregularly wavy, but straight and even.

"I have never seen a hatchet like this," said Juk slowly.

"We must go," said Awal, with an impatient shrug. "Come, the others will be expecting us; and besides, I want to see if they have ambushed our enemies."

Silently Juk thrust Ranta's hatchet into his belt, picked up his spear, and started off with Awal. They

headed west, in the general direction of the ambush which Karakaa had planned.

"A pity that this rock-thrower fled away," said Awal.

"Yes," murmured Juk, and because he was not sorry, and feared that Awal would divine how he felt, he added: "How did it happen that you came when you did?"

"Why, I heard your signal."

"The marmot call?"

"Yes."

"I gave no such signal," smiled Juk. "It was truly a marmot. I likewise heard it. That is how I came upon the ridge. Finding Ranta was mere chance."

"And you did not signal me then?"

"No."

"Why not?" demanded Awal. "There must have been time."

"There was, but I—I forgot."

"Forgot?" exclaimed Awal. "How could that be?"

"I do not know, but it was so," said Juk.

The Flint Chipper said no more, for he was afraid of Awal's sharp tongue, and he knew there would be ridicule from him if Awal discovered the truth. And what was the truth? Simply that Juk had found pleasure in talking to Ranta, at least until they had got to quarreling.

They walked on in silence, until in a brushy hollow

they heard something ahead, and found the imprint of a human heel. Awal leaned over to whisper in Juk's ear:

"Our rock-thrower again. This time—yes, this time I have him. I see his back. Let me throw."

Awal lifted his spear, but before he could throw it the man in the underbrush turned round and gave a warning cry. It was not Ranta, it was Talker.

"You hyena that skulks in the woods!" cried the old man, gritting his teeth at Awal. "Are you trying to slay me from behind, or what is this!"

"I mistook you for someone else," stammered the boy.

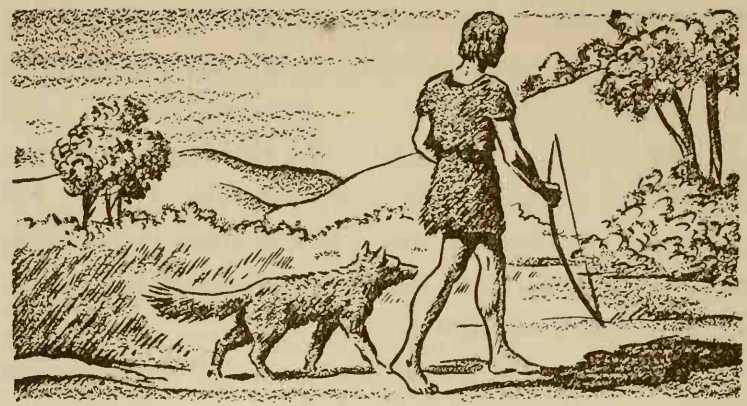
"With your young eyes! Pah on you, you cannot be trusted with a spear. You should stay at the cave and help the women gather firewood."

Juk laughed and interfered. "Where are the others?" he asked.

"Coming," said Talker.

"And the ambush?"

"It failed," answered the old man. "The strangers found no horse tracks and grew suspicious. All at once, like a covey of partridges, they scattered and were seen no more. Here comes Karakaa now."



CHAPTER V

Two Feet, Four Feet

I SMELL hares," said Big Foot, as Karakaa and his warriors turned toward home. "There is a nest of them near by."

The hunters scattered and ran the hares to cover in the skillful way they had, and after they had killed two of them they went on their way looking for more. By the time they were within sight of the cave they had killed both hares and squirrels.

"Enough," grunted the chief of the tribe.

As a rule the Hunting People took great delight in kill-

ing game, but today they slew only enough to still their hunger. They were discouraged by their failure to ambush the strangers who called themselves Beast Herders. Wearily Karakaa led the way to the home cave, and after their meat had been perhaps half-cooked in the fire and all the men had eaten, they talked of what had happened.

"Our enemies have escaped us," began the chief. "That is bad, though it would be worse if they had seen us. As things are now, they do not know that we are about."

"Yes, they know it," said Juk, and he held up Ranta's stone hatchet, telling the tale of how Awal and he had seen the young stranger shooting grouse, together with all that happened after that.

And again the Hunting People showed scant interest in things which would ordinarily have absorbed them—the new hatchet, and Ranta's bow and arrow, for instance. None of the elders commented upon the bow and arrow, and only Talker fingered the captured hatchet, as a thing worthwhile. The rest of the tribesmen were too uneasy; they had tried to ambush and destroy the newcomers in the region and the scheme had failed. Now the Beast Herders knew there were people about, and likely as not they would search them out.

"It is evil," murmured the chief, and he looked challengingly at Goort the wizard, adding: "Is there nothing Goort can do against them, before the strangers attack us?"

"There is perhaps something," said the wizard slowly, "but first let men be sent to see if our enemies plan to look for us. That is the thing which comes before anything else, as the head of a crane comes before its neck."

Karakaa jerked his head in assent. He signed to Nashad and a silent but crafty man who was called Claw Face because a bear had once clawed him under the right eye, and the streaky scars would be there until Claw Face died and turned into a fearful ghost.

"You two go spy," said the chief.

The spies slipped away to do Karakaa's bidding; then the wizard fixed his gleaming eyes upon Juk.

"Later I shall do magic against the strangers," he said, "but I cannot do this until I know more of the red ocher."

"Red ocher?" exclaimed Juk in surprise.

"Yes. According to your tale you came upon this Ranta in a meadow, and he was scraping ocher from a rock."

"That is true, yes."

Goort scowled mightily. "Now tell me," he demanded, "was this youth a magician or wizard?"

"No," said Juk, staring.

"Did he wear charms against evil spirits, or such other things as I have hanging from my belt?"

"No. He wore a horsehide for clothing, and nothing more, save a bracelet of shells about the right wrist. There was a pouch hanging from his belt, but all of us have such a thing."

"The charms were in his pouch," said the wizard with conviction. "He is a maker of spells, else he would not care to gather red ocher. Now Juk, you and Awal will lead me to that meadow so that I may get the red ocher left there, before this Ranta comes for it. Let us go at once; it is already late in the day."

The boys looked inquiringly at Karakaa, and the chief inclined his head. In most things Karakaa was leader, but here was a matter which seemed to be entangled in magic, and therefore Goort was the one to show the way and make decisions. The wizard caught up his spear, and Juk and Awal obediently set out with him for the meadow where Ranta had found the red ocher.

Why all this concern over red ocher? It was simple. Long long before Juk and Awal were born, far back in the days when the world was young and the human race younger still, our crude ancestors noticed that certain ores were spotted with yellow, while others were splashed with red. The red attracted them especially, because

it was lively and strong, and moreover it was the color of blood. This last gradually became important. Blood was associated with life, blood was red and certain kinds of ocher were red, from which primitive people concluded that red ocher was a symbol of life itself. In Karakaa's tribe the wizard had got in the way of gathering all the red ocher he could find, and also of forbidding anyone else to touch it. Men like Goort claimed that the ocher was magical, and on this account tabu to all save wizards. Hence his contention that Ranta was a spellmaker.

"If the youth were no magician," muttered Goort, following along behind Juk and Awal, "he would be slain by the evil spirits for daring to touch the ocher."

Juk cast a glance at his friend, wanting to say that Ranta bore no resemblance to a wizard, but not venturing to say it. It was not safe to cross Goort in things which touched upon his profession.

"With ocher, that young magician meant to do a spell upon us," declared Goort; "but if we get what red is left in the meadow he will be foiled, and I in turn shall have the upper hand. Red ocher is life, it is power, it is an invisible weapon against danger, destruction, and death."

They had come to the little cliff where Ranta had rolled the rocks down, and from here Juk, not Awal, led the way. Taking care not to make tracks which

could be easily seen and followed, they threaded the brushy ravine to the right, then turned up the slope to the meadow. It was deserted, and from the footprints it was certain that Ranta had not returned to get the rest of the ocher, as Goort had feared. The wizard examined the rock where the red stuff occurred.

"This is not for you to see," he told the boys. "Sit and wait for me, and say no word."

Obediently they sat down, watching Goort as he went about the task of collecting the bits of precious red ocher. With his knife tip he scraped and dug at the stuff, picking away refuse with his fingers but saving the smallest particle of red. In an hour he had gathered perhaps as much as could be held on a thumbnail, and was grinding his knife blade down into the rocky ore for additional bits. When he had finished he straightened up, opened his hide pouch, and took out the leg bone of a wild goose, each end cut off clean and plugged up with a bit of wood. Removing one of these plugs the wizard carefully brushed the red ocher into the hollow bone, and replaced the stopper. The wild-goose bone was to Goort what a glass vial might be to a modern, that is, a storage place for small amounts of rare and valuable material. The boys watched him, Awal whispering:

"Will he make another horrid design on his breast with that red ocher?"

An uneasy look passed over Juk's face. Even in summertime the wizard wore his robe high up around his neck, in order to conceal a red and black pattern which he had tattooed into the skin of his breast. This pattern, a combination of magical designs, Goort revealed only at times of special ceremony, but the boys never saw the wizard without remembering the dreadful tattooing, and feeling very uncomfortable as a consequence.

"I do not know," murmured Juk. "I hope not."

Goort replaced the vial of red ocher in his pouch and turned to scowl.

"I warned you not to speak," he said.

"We did not, until you were finished," answered Juk, rising to his feet. "Shall we go back now?"

"Yes, it grows late," said Awal. "Soon the sun is down, and the world black. Come, Juk."

"Stop!" cried the wizard. "Halt your feet. This is not all. There is more to do."

"What is it?" asked Awal, not knowing what he meant.

"Listen to me," said the wizard, thrusting his face toward them. "The youth called Ranta is a magician, and he was gathering red ocher here. That is bad and doubly bad. He could work harm against us—if he stays loose."

Awal gulped noisily. "You mean he must be caught?"

"Yes; and this is the place for it. He will return for the rest of the ocher, and when he does you two must capture him."

"What!" cried Juk. "We two? Awal and I?"

"No others," said Goort tersely. "Now I go."

"Wait," exclaimed Awal. "You leave us? Why is that? How are Juk and I to catch this rascal?"

"Use your wit, if you have any," was the answer. "I have other things to do, so I return to the cave; but you two will stay and trap the young stranger who seeks to cast spells upon us."

"Ah, but the sun is lowering," said Juk. "If he comes it may not be tonight."

"Then you will catch him about dawn," said the wizard calmly.

"We shall all go to the cave," suggested Awal, "and then just before dawn—"

"That will bring you here too late," interrupted Goort. "You will stay here tonight, here or hereabouts, so as to be on hand at the first sign of dawn. Now I go."

The boys were startled. They exchanged frightened glances, not knowing what to say. Then Awal cried out:

"We cannot do it! It would be an evil thing, staying here alone in the night."

"You will do it," retorted the wizard. "Return to the cave tonight, and I will cast a bone-twisting spell

upon you, so that henceforth you will seek to go in one direction and your legs will carry you in another, even the crabs going a straighter path than you will be able to go. Say no more. Remain here; trap this Ranta, and fetch him to me, that I may get his magic from him."

"Tarry an eyewink longer," begged Awal. "We are to fetch him living to you? We are not to kill him?"

"Kill him? No. There is no sense to be had from a dead man, any more than there are croaks from a dead frog. Catch him, I said, and bring him to me at the cave. That is all."

Goort went off across the meadow, the boys following him with their eyes. He disappeared in the brush. They were alone, the sun sinking rapidly in the west, shadows already forming about them. The Flint Chipper gazed about, his glance furtive.

"We cannot stay here," he murmured.

"Ah, we cannot go to the cave," objected Awal. "He would punish us cruelly."

"That is true, but let us get away from this meadow for the night. It is open to prowling beasts, and Ranta will never come before morning. Ho, I know a safe place."

"Where?"

"The cave we call Two-hole Cave, because it has two mouths. We lived there once."

Awal grinned with relief. "Let us go there," he said. "It is not far, if we cut across the hills. We can have a fire; it will not be seen, not be smelled."

They clutched their weapons and hurried off, wanting to reach Two-hole Cave before the sun set. Black shadows lay in the ravines, but the ridges were still bright with sunlight, and the boys kept their eyes on these ridges, rather than on lower places, where twilight would soon be thickening into dusk. Up a rocky gorge, around a bend, and they saw the cave, whereupon they broke into a run, not halting until they had reached the mouth of the cavern. The entrance was small, with a still smaller exit a short distance along the hillside.

"Make fire," panted Awal; "and when there is light we shall tend to the other mouth."

Juk understood. They gathered sticks, kindled a blaze by means of their iron pyrites, and fed the fire until it lighted up not only the entrance to the cave but the beginning of the tunnel which led into the interior of the hill. The boys then took up firebrands and painstakingly examined the dirt at the mouth of the cave, seeking bear tracks. For this cave was the favorite den of a surly old brown bear; he hibernated here every winter, and when people dared to quarter themselves here they observed two precautions: first, they did not take possession until they were sure that the old bear was

safely asleep inside; and second, they sought another cave before the bear awakened from his long sleep and came forth into the outer air, cross and hungry.

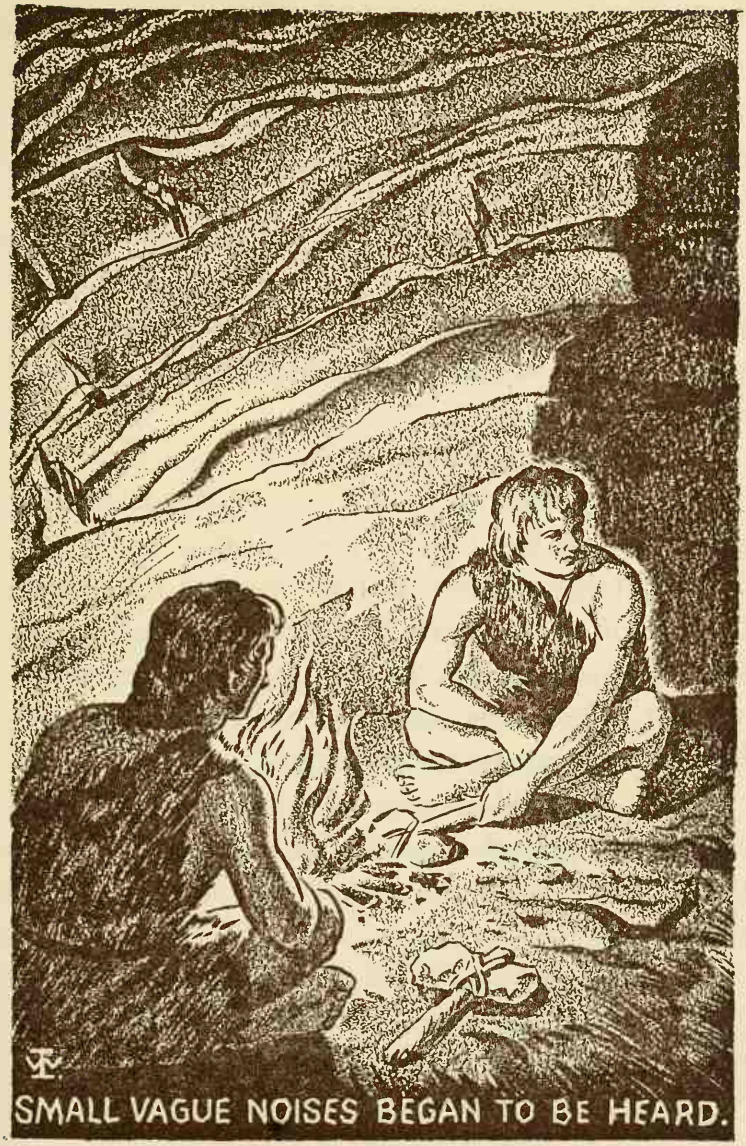
"No tracks," said Juk; "probably he came out the other mouth as usual."

"I hope that," muttered Awal. "If he is inside we shall have to roost in a tree, like bats or birds."

Renewing their torches at the fire they hurried to the smaller mouth of the cave, and there, to their joy, they found the great clawed tracks of the bear. He had left his den many days ago; the boys could safely stay here for the night, comfortable at their fire.

Comfortable, yet not easy in their minds. Juk and Awal were brave as any of their kind, but probably no primitive man was happy when the sun went away and the black mysterious enemy-concealing night settled upon him. They collected a supply of wood and squatted on their heels, gazing with rapt attention into the flames and avoiding the blackness beyond the flickering circle of firelight.

Small vague noises began to be heard; animals and insects made these sounds, but to the two boys it appeared that some of the rustlings and shrill squeakings came from the evil spirits which ranged abroad under cover of the night. Awal moved closer to his friend, and Juk was happy to have him do it.



SMALL VAGUE NOISES BEGAN TO BE HEARD.

"A curse upon Goort the wizard," muttered Awal.

"Take care," said Juk quickly. "You have no demons at your call, and Goort has. Curses from you and me would hurt him as little as leaves dropping out of a tree in the autumn of the year."

"It is an evil task he sets us," Awal growled.

"No, the task is not evil, it is the night away from our people which is evil. I am glad we have weapons, even though human weapons are weak against the spirits of the night. Perhaps . . ."

"What do you say?" asked Awal.

Juk had picked up Ranta's stone hatchet, brought along from the home cave. He smiled at it, saying:

"Now I do not believe that the owner of this weapon is a wizard, as Goort says, but if he were, perhaps the hatchet would protect us tonight. The weapons of wizards surely have power against evil. . . . Do you believe he is the wizard Goort claims?"

"No," said Awal. "People of our age are never spell-makers, any more than nestling eagles show the old ones how to fly. It is nonsense, like Goort's scheme to catch this Ranta."

"Wanting to catch Ranta is not nonsense," declared Juk. "He has bow and arrows. If we get them from him I shall know how to make such weapons."

Awal did not answer, and Juk fell to studying the

hatchet which Ranta had abandoned in the meadow. The Flint Chipper swung it experimentally to and fro, then he swung his own, surprised at the difference between them.

"Ranta's would strike a truer blow," he observed. "It has the stone head through a hole in the butt of the handle, and this keeps the weight in proper balance. With our hatchets the head is not lashed exactly in the center line of the handle, so that the blow is always a little off."

"What is that hooting out there in the darkness?" whispered Awal.

"An owl, I think."

"Sometimes demons take the form of owls, in order to deceive us," muttered Awal.

That was doubtless a fact, thought Juk, but he tried not to think of it. If horrid demons were to descend upon them, the boys would have no protection; and accordingly the best thing to do was to try to ignore the danger. Juk scarcely dared to breathe as he sat there by the fire, nevertheless he would not look into the darkness, and he would not encourage Awal to speak of demons. The Flint Chipper gazed at Ranta's stone hatchet, trying his best to think of nothing else.

"It is different stone than I have ever seen before," he murmured.

"What is more natural?" said Awal, stealing a glance at the hatchet. "The people who call themselves Beast Herders are different from any we have ever seen; thus their weapons likewise are different."

"The stone is flint, but so much darker than our flint," continued Juk. "Yet that is not what puzzles me most. The thing I cannot understand is how it was smoothed and rubbed down, after the chipping was done."

"That was done by use," said Awal.

"No," said Juk, glancing at the chipped head of his own hatchet. "A little smoothing can be got from use, but not so much as you can see in Ranta's weapon. Something else did it."

"Running water," suggested Awal. "Everybody knows that there are stones at the bottom of brooks, and since the water spirits have little to do they take these stones and rub them until they are round and smooth. I have seen just such stones as this hatchet head, lying in streams. That is where Ranta got it."

And still Juk was not satisfied. He knew about the stones in stream beds, indeed he and his people sometimes used them, if they found one shaped to their purpose. The hatchet that had been used by Ranta, however, did not fit in with Awal's explanation.

"Look at it," said Juk, "and you will see that it was chipped first and then smoothed down. The stones we

take from streams do not follow this course: we pick them up only if they are nearly what we want, requiring very little chipping. Thus the order is different: smoothing first and chipping later, while with Ranta's hatchet it is chipping first and smoothing later."

There was a weary yawn from Awal. He was persistent when it was a question of following a trail or killing game, but arguments tired him very quickly.

"People as queer as the Beast Herders," he murmured, "could do it any way at all. They chipped the hatchet and then put it in a stream to smooth down."

"Such a smoothing would take many winters and summers," said Juk. Then he, too, yawned.

The boys yawned and sighed, and leaned against each other in the slumberous fashion of people who wish to stay awake and cannot. Before the coals of a fire could glow, and fade, and glow again, Juk and his friend were sound asleep, all the terrors of the night forgotten. Later they sprawled out on the ground, but without awakening. They slept the night through, not so much as stirring until the cawing of a crow startled them. Then they sprang up, spears in hand, and eyes darting all about.

"We let the fire die down," said Awal. "Some creature could have come against us, wanting us for meat."

"It is dawn," observed Juk, shivering with cold. "I wish we could build a fire and go hunt meat."

"That we must do," Awal nodded.

"No; have you forgotten Goort, and what he told us to do? We must get to the meadow and hide, lest Ranta come and go unhindered."

Awal scowled, but came along. They drank at a little stream and made their way back to the meadow. The spot was still as death. Juk pulled a handful of wild onions, giving half of them to his friend.

"We must hide in the brush," he whispered. "The onions will stave off hunger until we can hunt."

"If this Ranta does not come by the time the sun is at its highest, I go back to the cave," said Awal, accepting the food Juk offered him. "This way is a thicket where we can see without being seen."

They made sure that it was a good place to spy from, and sat down. Slowly and methodically they ate the wild onions, bulbs first, then stalks, and finally the green shoots.

Time passed. The mist went away, the sun rose, insects and small birds began to move about. A file of ants attacked Awal, the boy knocking them resentfully off into the brush. The sun climbed higher, and Juk was about to despair of Ranta when he heard a voice.

"He is coming, and another with him," whispered Juk.

"Or perhaps more than one is with him, and if that

is true we are outdone," Awal murmured back. "Sh-h, they come nearer."

The voice continued at intervals, but curiously enough there was no answering voice. Juk and Awal peered through the bushes. The young stranger of yesterday was just appearing at the other side of the meadow, and with him was no man, no two-footed human creature at all, but only a wolflike beast padding along behind him. A two-foot and a four-foot traveling together, and the one talking to the other! The boys stared in dismay, for Goort had said that Ranta was a magician, and this appeared to Juk and Awal to prove it.

Suddenly the animal at Ranta's heels began to bark. It had sensed the two waiting in ambush and was warning its master. Quick as a partridge, Ranta darted back out of sight, the four-foot with him.

"Gone!" exclaimed Juk, and did not know whether he was glad or sorry.

"No matter," said Awal, recovering from the shock which Ranta's companion had given him. "Up with you! We must catch him, otherwise Goort will do us evil. Quick, come with me!"

CHAPTER VI

Curiosity Is a Club

I HEAR him!" cried Juk, leaping across the meadow. "This way, not the way you are going."

"Be quiet," said Awal, and changed his course. "Let Ranta be the one to make noise, so that we can follow him."

Juk and Awal were running close together, sometimes separated by the width of a thicket, but no more than that. They did not bother with tracks. The direction of Ranta's flight was marked, not by footprints but by the barking of the wolf, or dog, or whatever the crea-

ture was. Straight across the brushy plateau to the west darted the two fugitives, Ranta silent and unseen, his four-footed companion now and then bounding into view, and always noisy. Once the beast let out a startled howl, and from that Juk and his friend guessed that Ranta was trying to silence it.

"He has kicked it, or thrown a stone at it," gasped the triumphant Awal. "It lets us track them, and this Ranta knows such a thing is bad."

Juk dodged a thorn bush and sped on, a little bothered by the two stone hatchets flopping at his belt. One he was used to, a second was an encumbrance. He shifted them back out of the way, jerked his spear free of a blackberry vine, and gazed ahead. It struck him that Ranta was heading off to the southwest.

"We will do better to cut to the left," panted Juk. "He wants to get into the ravine ahead and then escape down to the valley where his people are camped. Wait, though, what has happened to his wolf?"

The four-foot had let out a yelp, and after that there was no sound from it. What had Ranta done to the creature? Juk and Awal paused, breathing as quietly as possible in order to hear better.

There was nothing to be heard. The wolf neither barked nor growled, Ranta himself was as silent as if he had fallen dead. And that was impossible. Probably

the boy had fallen upon the four-footed one and slain it for its telltale noise, but why was Ranta silent? There were two earnest pursuers on his trail, and if he had wit he would not tarry.

"Do you hear anything?" whispered Awal.

"No."

"It is strange. He is not far ahead. Perhaps he is waiting in ambush, afraid he cannot escape and therefore planning to kill us with arrows."

The Flint Chipper nodded. "We must find their tracks," he murmured. "He is somewhere in that clump of rock and brush. You go one way, I will go the other."

Awal agreed at once. They separated, crouching close to the ground and watching for tracks, and at the same time sniffing to get the wolf's scent. The odor of the beast was in the air, and since it followed Ranta the tracks of the four-foot would serve the boys as well as the footprints of Ranta himself.

The sound of low whistling came to Awal. He turned and hurried back to Juk.

"Did you whistle?" he asked.

"Yes," said Juk. "Here are Ranta's tracks, and also a bit of hair torn from the wolf. It is as I thought, they are in that clump of rocky thicket."

"Then take your spear and we shall rush it," murmured Awal.

"If he lets fly with an arrow there will be no time for a second one; we shall have him."

"No killing him, remember," said Juk.

"Ha, I remember," scowled Awal; "but also I remember my shoulder, bruised by the rock he threw down from the cliff. I will mark him up a little for that. Now are you ready?"

"Yes."

The boys grasped their spears, and at a signal rushed forward, crashing into the thicket and looking about for Ranta.

He was not there. No Ranta, and no wolf. Their tracks had certainly led here, but they had vanished. Juk and Awal combed the patch of brush, finding tracks but nothing more. At last they halted, sweaty and scratched by thorns, and exasperation in their faces.

"I have never seen such tricks," grumbled Awal.

"Ranta is clever," Juk murmured.

"Fui, you are always saying that," retorted Awal. "He is not clever, he is more than clever. That rascal smells of the dark."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that he is more than human. He is in league with evil spirits, a magician. Time and time again he eludes us, and today he has vanished like a bird out of a treetop, taking a dead wolf with him."

Juk was confused. It had pleased him to think of Ranta as a boy like himself, and he did not see how he was to continue to do this. For, as Awal had said, Ranta had done things which smacked of more than human cleverness. A little shiver ran over the Flint Chipper.

"What shall we do?" he asked.

"Magician or no magician," said Awal abruptly, "we must catch him if we can. I have no mind for what Goort would do to us if we come back empty-handed; and besides, this Ranta is young and hence may not be harmful. If he could destroy us with spells he would have done it before this; I think he is still learning how to be a wizard, and so far is cunning only at escaping people, as he has done with us. We must keep after him."

There was a bold stout heart in Awal, and soon Juk was equally willing to go on. They made their way out of the thicket, began to descend a slope into a ravine, and found the clear fresh print of Ranta's foot. The boys grinned with pleasure, and also with relief.

"I said so!" declared Awal. "If he is a magician he is still learning how, for though he got rid of the wolf he leaves his own tracks behind. He crept out of the brush in this direction."

"Then the way to catch him," said Juk, "is to cut

around and head him off, as he comes down the ravine to the valley."

It was a good plan, and at once they put it to work. Circling back up the slope they found an old game trail and trotted along this to the south. The ravine where Ranta supposedly traveled was on their right hand, the valley where the strangers camped was straight ahead. Swiftly and without pause they ran, for it was likely that Ranta, too, would hurry, and it was a question of whether they could head him off before he reached the valley.

"This trail swings down to the right," panted Juk, who was ahead.

"Ah, it should," answered his friend. "It will bring us to the mouth of the ravine, I think. That is where we want to be. Faster; I am treading on your heel."

Juk redoubled his pace. It was downhill now, and fortunately the well-worn trail enabled them to run easily. There were few stones to trip them up, few bushes to lash their faces. They were cutting down on a slant, the bottom of the ravine nearer and nearer. With a violent effort Juk slackened up, his feet so numb that it was all he could do to keep from falling. The boys came to a halt, pebbles rattling as they struggled to hold back.

"Too much noise," gritted Awal. "He will hear."

"Hide," panted Juk. "I think we have beaten him."

Gasping hoarsely, they crept down behind a fringe of bushes, and waited for their breathing to ease. Their mouths were dry, their throats raw and hot; they could not get air fast enough. Then little by little they felt better. They relaxed, enjoying a few moments of rest.

"Can you see the trail where he must pass?" whispered Juk.

"No. Perhaps we should get down a little closer."

They listened, made sure no one was coming down the ravine, and got a little nearer the trail. Now they were able to see well, the ravine on their right, the upper end of the valley on their left. There were a number of horses in sight, and men behind them. Juk watched them, aware that the animals were being moved.

"The horses are going down the valley," he murmured. "They are driving them that way."

"To change grazing grounds, perhaps," said Awal.

"I hope it does not mean that the strangers are fleeing."

"Why should it?"

"Ranta may have passed. He could have beat us to the valley, and now he is warning them that there is trouble in the hills."

"You and I are that trouble?" asked Awal, with a rueful face. "This Ranta does not fear us so much.

Horses need new grazing; we know that from having watched wild ones feeding in the hills. The men are moving them to thicker grass, that is all."

A tapping noise made them glance back up the ravine. It was a woodpecker, but perhaps it had meaning for them. Sometimes hunters used the woodpecker's rapping as a signal, although most people thought it too noisy to be a good signal.

"Ranta?" whispered Juk.

"No," said Awal. "Only a bird. Yet he should be here now."

The ravine settled back into its silence, and gradually the boys got into the way of watching the valley. The horses had passed out of sight, but now there were men trudging up from the direction of the pond. They were armed, and to judge from their manner they were going somewhere in a body, bent upon either war or hunting. Juk and Awal watched them, puzzled to know what was up.

Without warning a youth appeared at the southwest corner of the valley, a wolflike creature behind him.

"It is Ranta!" exclaimed Juk. "He slipped up over the ridge to the west, suspecting we would try to head him off."

"And he did not kill the wolf, but muzzled it," grumbled Awal. "Look, you can see from here that the beast

has a cord around its muzzle; it keeps trying to paw it off."

Ranta called to the men in the valley, and they waited for him to come up. What would he say to them? Perhaps he would set them on the trail of the two who had chased him, perhaps he would relate the adventure as a thing too little and trivial to be followed up. Juk and Awal watched closely; they were too far away to hear words, but no matter, they would know from Ranta's gestures and general attitude. Even today there are people who convey much information by means of signs, and in primitive times this kind of "talk" was much more important than it is now. Boys like Juk and Awal were trained to interpret gestures and body movements. Much of their knowledge of the habits of wild animals they had acquired by close observation of what such animals did and how they did it; and similarly of people. Ranta was talking to his companions, and he was clearly omitting to speak of his adventure with the two who had thought to capture him.

"The others ask him where he has been," murmured Juk, "and he makes excuses."

"He is afraid the chief of his tribe will punish him for venturing into danger," declared Awal.

"Perhaps not. Perhaps Ranta thinks it is his own affair, this feud with us."

"It is a feud which will come to a quick end if I get hold of him," growled Awal.

"That is what the hawk said of the mole," Juk reminded him; "but the mole kept out of reach, and the hawk was a fool for boasting."

"Am I a fool?" demanded Awal hotly.

"How could you be, when you are no hawk!" grinned Juk. "Wait; the tribesmen are sending Ranta back, and they are going on into the hills."

Ranta was arguing, his gestures saying clearly as words that he wanted to go along with the others. The older men pointed to the horses, making signs for the boy to go to them; and from this Juk and Awal understood that the tribesmen had been waiting for Ranta to return, so that he could watch the horse herd and they would be free to set out on their trip into the hills. With a shrug Ranta gave in; he stood and watched while the file of warriors passed out of sight, north toward the ravine which lay west over the ridge from where Juk and his friend were lurking.

"His people think to hunt out our tribe and give them death," said Juk.

"If they think that, they think falsely," answered Awal. "They go the wrong way. And this Ranta, what will he do? If he slips off after them, we shall yet have a chance at him."

It was clear that Ranta had not yet made up his mind. He stood watching his friends, his shoulders slumped forward in an attitude of unwillingness and resentment. Beside him squatted the wolf, still fighting the thong around its muzzle. Juk peered at the beast, his opinion of it changing. Why, it was no wolf at all, at least not a true wolf, a wolf such as Juk was accustomed to see in the hills. The creature was more like a jackal or wild dog, one of those crafty man-followers that you always saw at a tribal hunt. At such times the jackals came from all directions, slinking after the hunters and devouring what they chose to leave at their camps. There had grown up a kind of partnership between men and these wild dogs, the hunters sometimes hurling meat at them for the sake of seeing them fight for it, the dogs shadowing anyone who seemed likely to kill game. The names which men gave those creatures were various and confusing, because there were several breeds of them, and the animals were slowly changing their nature. They were getting to be more like dogs and less like jackals or wolves; wild dogs at first, and then throughout the ages tamer and more friendly to Man, until some day they would rank as his most devoted comrade, the first animal to be completely domesticated.

"We were witless to think the beast a wild wolf," said

Juk. "It is a dog. Ranta caught it young, as we ourselves have had similar cubs. I remember that while my father still lived there was a great reindeer hunt, and a bull reindeer crushed the ribs of a young dog, and my father gave it to me to play with."

"I remember that dog," nodded Awal. "What became of it?"

"There was cruel snow and ice that winter," said Juk, "and we could find no food. So we ate the dog."

"Was it good?"

"I do not remember," answered Juk. "I did not want to eat it. It was my pet, and I felt strangely after we had devoured it."

"You ate parts of it that were not meant to be eaten," Awal declared. "Ho, but this Ranta uses his dog for more than pet or food; the beast gave him warning that we were trying to ambush him. I would not mind having a dog that could do such things, although it likewise barked too much as they fled, and would have betrayed him, had he not muzzled it. Perhaps dogs are worthless, all in all."

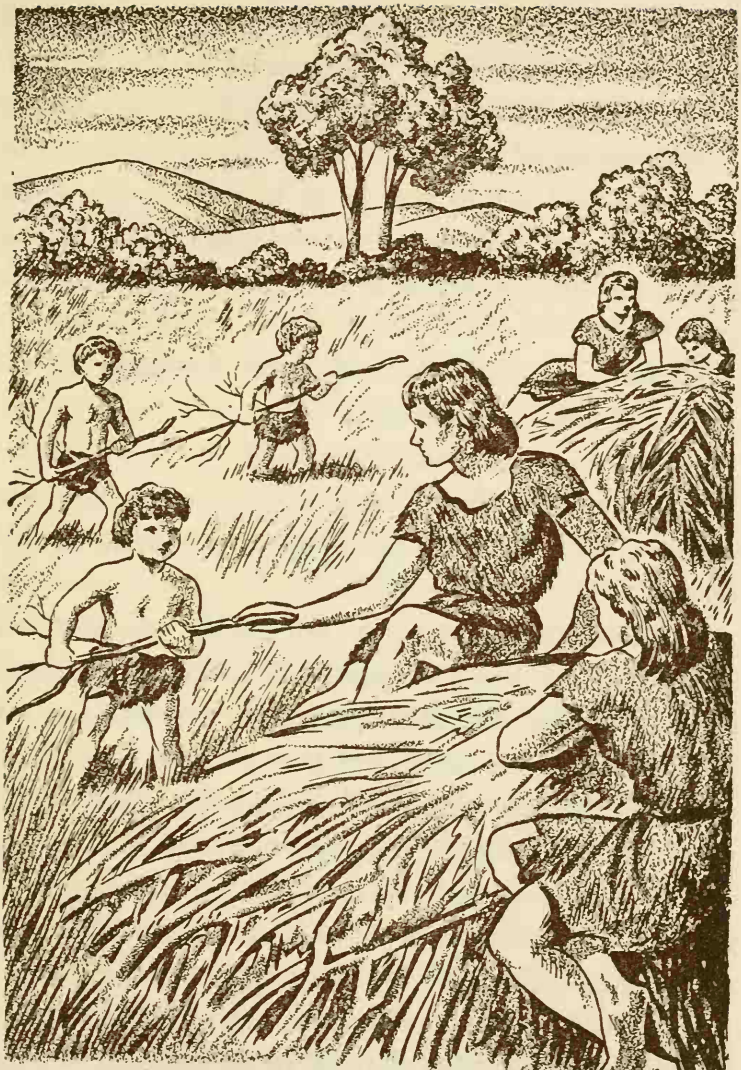
Ranta had turned away from the hills. Stooping a moment, he pulled the thong from the dog's snout, whereupon the creature fell to barking madly. The two went slowly on toward the pond. In a little while he passed out of sight.

"Let us see where he goes," suggested Awal. "It may be that we shall have another chance at him."

They crept on down the ravine, keeping behind bushes and craning toward the pond. Soon they paused again. There was a fairly clear view of the camp from here. The horses were grazing on the eastern side of the pond, just south of the camp itself. Ranta stood talking to the women; the women and children were busy at work.

"Finishing the storage pits!" exclaimed Juk in surprise. "They have kept at them, it seems."

The pits were two in number, and as Juk had said, they were nearing completion. Long hours of digging with sticks and deerhorn picks had at length produced a pair of large holes each wider than a man is long. The dirt taken out of the pits had been thrown up as a kind of encircling rim, an earthwork which served to increase the depth of the holes themselves. Also the excavations were roofed over. The branches of trees had been spread across the pits, leafy ends resting on the earthwork, woodier ends slanting up to form a low cone above the interior of the pit. Evidently this cone of roof branches was supported by a center-pole from within, for the framework of limbs and twigs was strong enough for women to clamber onto them and weave smaller sticks in and out among them. The children were dragging up branches, the women were strengthening and tight-



THE CHILDREN WERE DRAGGING
UP BRANCHES FOR THE ROOFS.

ening the roofs. Ranta watched them idly, until a small girl called to him to look at the pond.

"Something flashed white," said Juk. "I saw it."

The surface of the pond was shining in the sun, and no sooner had Ranta turned to look than the white something appeared again. It rose from the water as a flash, glinting an instant in the light and then vanishing.

"A demon beckoning," said Awal, frowning.

"No, a fish," smiled Juk.

"I have never seen such a big fish."

"The one that Ranta harpooned the other day was that big," Juk reminded him. "See—he is going to fish again."

Ranta had actually started for the log which served as a raft-canoe, but a woman spoke to him shrilly, and he shrugged and turned to the horses. She had warned him to watch the herd, and let the fishing go. Reluctantly the boy walked along the edge of the pond, the dog behind him, the horses gradually moving on ahead, grazing as they went. Now and then another fish leaped into the air, and when this happened Ranta cried out in excitement; but the women did not answer.

"More withes!" exclaimed the one who had spoken so shrilly to Ranta. She gestured to the children, urging them on.

"There is no more willow," replied a child.

"We must have more," said another woman, and seeing that Ranta had reached the lower end of the pond she called out to him: "Are there good willow withes there?"

"Yes!" he called back.

"We shall leave off work and go gather them," said a woman. "All of us can go, children and grown-ups alike; in that way it can be done better and faster. If you leave the children alone they play in the water, catching frogs and such things."

The women clambered down off the roofs, motioned the children to go on ahead, and passed slowly down the edge of the pond. Juk and Awal watched them, utterly absorbed. The wizard of their tribe had told them to catch Ranta and they had tried, but now Goort and his orders had been forgotten; the boys were thinking only of the camp there by the pond. Camps were fascinating places. Even after they had been a long time deserted, and the rain and the wind had beaten the human smell out of them, even then they were strangely interesting. Such places were so different from the lairs of animals. Men had made them, women had made fires and cooked in them, children had marked senseless things on the ground, the bones of game animals lay about, sometimes there were weapons half buried in the dirt. Broken

weapons, generally; but if a camp were still inhabited, and its people gone from it only a little while, then there might be unbroken weapons about. Juk licked his dry lips. The camp was pulling him as a hunter might pull a tendon from the hind leg of a deer.

"No one is there," murmured the Flint Chipper.

"That is true," said Awal, blinking hard.

"The men are gone, the women are gone, the children are gone," continued Juk.

"The women and children are not gone for long."

"It will take them time to gather withes."

"Yet I can see them," said Awal.

Juk looked at him with a slow smile. "You want to do it as much as I do," he said.

"Do what?" demanded Awal.

"Go to the camp."

"Pah! What for?"

"To see the things that are there," said Juk eagerly. "To examine the storage pits they have dug, to hunt for food, to—"

"That is right; I am hungry."

"We have had nothing to eat since morning, and then no more than wild onions. Perhaps the strangers did not eat all they have cooked. There could be meat there."

"Yes, yes," said Awal, his courage momentarily rising.

"And perhaps we could find weapons, even the bow and arrows that I want. It is our chance."

Awal turned cautious. "Our chance to get caught," he said.

"Who could do that?"

"There might be someone in the pits."

"Oh, no. The men went off, the women and children are going down the shore of the pond. Why should anyone be inside the pits?"

"I do not know," said Awal, "but with strangers, you never know what to expect."

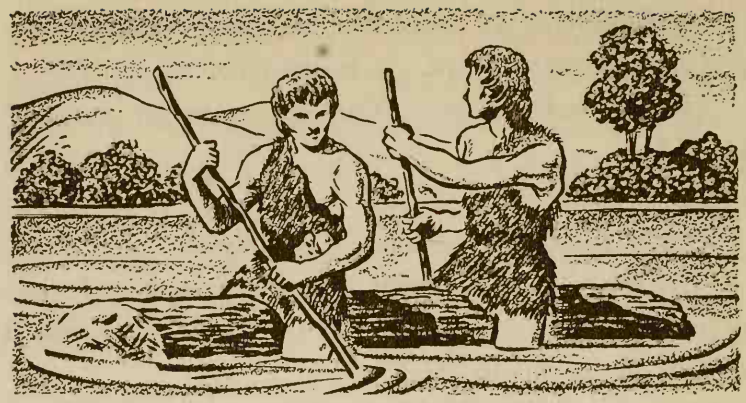
Juk tensed. "I am going," he said. "Will you go with me?"

"I have as much courage as you," retorted Awal. "Wait a little, until the women are out of sight."

"They will be out of sight before we are away from this brush," answered Juk. "Come, I am jerking, I want to go so much."

"Curiosity is a club," murmured Awal. "There is no holding back from it. But let us go carefully, lest we get broken heads for this."

"Broken heads, or arrows in our flesh," said Juk grimly; "but no matter, we must see what their camp is like."



CHAPTER VII

Their First Roof

THE boys wasted no time in getting to the camp. They had done all their arguing and hesitating in the brush, and now that their minds were made up they crouched low against the ground and ran swiftly toward the pond. At its northern end there were tall marsh plants of the cat-tail variety, and these afforded Juk and Awal a screen. Peeping over the cat-tails, they made sure that neither Ranta nor the women and children could see them, then without a word they darted on to the camp.

"Ho ho!" cried Juk in his excitement. "There are things here just as I thought."

Actually the camp of the strangers was rather barren and poorly furnished, but to the boys it was wonderfully interesting. This was the dwelling place of the unknown people, a clever, different people wandering here from no one knew where: everything about the camp, therefore, was fascinating and highly intriguing. The damp smooth ground was marked by countless footprints, and one of the fires was still alive.

Scattered here and there were the bones of wild animals that the strangers had eaten, including a wild pig, many grouse, and a swamp-haunting beast which Juk and Awal could not identify, for the reason that they themselves had never been able to kill a specimen. People had chewed the last bit of meat from these bones, and afterward Ranta's dog had gnawed away the gristle and crumbly ends. Awal picked up what he recognized as the shoulder blade of a wild hog and tried to find a morsel for his teeth, but there was nothing.

"That comes of having a wild dog about," he grumbled. "Such a creature devours what could feed a man."

"Look, here are other things," said Juk, hurrying to a small fire which had been allowed to go out. "A wooden cup, and pronged sticks to hold meat up out of the flames, and these baskets!"

The baskets were crude affairs. One of them had been fashioned out of the cat-tails which the later inhabitants of Britain were to use so extensively for mats and chair-seats, but the finished product was too soft and lacked shape, so that it had been discarded. The rest of the baskets were woven out of limber sticks, and while they were good enough for roots or chunks of meat or even large berries, they were so full of holes as to be worthless for smaller objects. Moreover, these stick baskets were so much like the baskets which his own people made that Awal only glanced at them.

"Pah!" he said. "Let us look for better things than this. Where are the weapons we were going to find? Yes, and the food! I am hungry. Everything inside me is rolling, like sky demons when they make thunder behind the clouds."

"The food must be in the storage pits," declared Juk.

They turned to the nearest of the two pits. The unfinished roof of it was no higher than the boys at the waist, and accordingly they decided to peep down into the hole from above, instead of venturing in by the doorway. Stealthily they came up, gazing wide-eyed at the earthen wall on which the roof sticks rested, and noticing how the butt ends of the branches were kept in place by being tied to an inner center pole with leathern thongs. The boys looked in.

"No food," said Awal in disgust.

"Ah!" said Juk.

"Ah!" retorted his friend, drawing back. "Can we eat that?"

"Come here," said the Flint Chipper strongly. "Look, Awal, we made a mistake. We thought these pits were meant as storage places, and they are not. See that robe down there? And the ashes on a fire? This is no cache, it is a hut!"

"What?" exclaimed Awal.

"A hut, a dwelling, a kind of grotto in the earth," said Juk excitedly. "It is a house!"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because," said Awal, "I have never seen a house like this."

"You have never seen a mammoth, either, yet you know from the tales of the old men of the tribe that there are such creatures."

"The old men have never told of houses like this," Awal flung back at him.

"No matter," said Juk, "this is a house. We who are Hunting People live in caves in winter and in the open air in summer, but often when we are out in the weather and storms come, we crawl into thickets and pull the branches together over our heads. Ha!"

"Now what?" demanded Awal, peering down beside his friend.

"I see a curious stone in there," said Juk. "I am going inside and find out what it is."

"You will find yourself in a trap, like a beast fallen in one of the game pits we dig in the hills!" cried Awal.

"I will take care," said Juk.

They rose up and went round to the other side of the hut, where a gap had been left in the earthwork. This was the entrance, narrow, descending at a steep angle, and so low that even a boy would have to stoop to avoid bumping his head on the roof ends.

"The entrance is on the lee side, away from the wind," Juk observed. "These people know how to do things."

"Perhaps they know how to catch witless ones in traps, too!" said Awal warningly.

"Come in with me."

"That I will not. Go in if you want to, but I stay here."

"Keep guard then," said Juk, and he bent low and began to creep down the dirty incline. His heart was leaping painfully; he was frightened and wanted to turn and flee back into the safety of the outer air; yet he could not retreat. Prodded on by a kind of stubborn recklessness, he went on and on, paused at the hut

door to sniff suspiciously, then ducked down to avoid the roof and entered.

Gradually he lost his uneasiness. The trembling went out of his legs, his breathing was quieter. It was no trap after all; it was only a hut, the floor and sides of dirt, the stick roof high enough that it enabled him to stand erect. Juk gazed about. A few roots hung suspended from the center pole, ashes lay to one side, and against the farther curve of the wall there was a horsehide robe. The boy remembered what Ranta had said about clothing: how the hides which the Hunting People wore were stiff and poorly tanned, while the robes of the Beast Herders were better. Juk went to the horsehide and felt the edge of it.

"Ranta was right," he murmured. "It is not so stiff as our skin clothing. I wonder how they do it."

Without thinking what he did, he tossed the hide to one side, and was surprised to see that something was concealed under it. A big flat stone, dark-colored and hard, of the sort known as basalt. What was it doing under the hide? Perhaps it had not been concealed at all, but had been placed at one end of the robe to act as a kind of headrest, a primitive pillow.

Then Juk noticed a curious groove in the basalt, and from what he knew of stone-working he was certain that this groove had been made by human hand. He

bent down to examine it, feeling of the edge of the slit, and was completely baffled, until suddenly, with a flash of inspiration, he knew the answer to the riddle. Jerking Ranta's stone hatchet from his belt, he lay the stone head in the groove in the basalt.

"It fits," he whispered, then he snatched up his spear and rose to his feet. A shadow had darkened the entrance to the hut. Someone was coming in!

A wave of terror pulsed over Juk. With the unreasoning dread of an animal that must forever be on the watch against the threat of death, the boy sprang to the door—and bumped into Awal.

"What is the matter?" said Awal.

"I saw your shadow," gasped Juk. "I thought it was another, an enemy."

Awal had come to peep into the house, but Juk's fright made him lose interest; they went back outside, glad to be under the sky again. Their first hut, their first roof, had bothered them as much as it had interested them.

"I have discovered how these people grind their weapons," said Juk, and told of the basalt he had found. "We thought running water did it, but it was done by rubbing one stone against another!"

It was an astonishing discovery. Modern boys would doubtless have guessed it at first sight of a polished,

smoothed-down hatchet head, but Juk and Awal were not modern boys. They were primitive, their minds clouded with error and superstition and dark abysmal ignorance. Today the discoveries and the knowledge of all past ages tend to be found in books, open to any child who can read the printed page; but in Juk's time the learning process was infinitely slower, more laborious and piecemeal. The human race was climbing the ladder of culture, yet so slowly that from our point of view it would have seemed to be standing still.

Thus, for instance, the young flint chipper had just found out how stone tools and weapons could be ground into shape, but although he was astonished and pleased he did not appreciate the value of the discovery. This new method of work was to cause modern students to divide early men into stone-chipping peoples and stone-rubbing peoples, labeling the first "paleolithic" and relatively crude, labeling the second "neolithic" and relatively advanced in culture. Yet not even Juk was destined to make much use of the new method, and as for Awal, he dismissed the whole subject with a yawn and a bit of head scratching.

"What I want is food," said Awal suddenly, "and here it is!"

Juk stared at the thing in Awal's hand. It was a roundish flat object, so black that it had certainly been

dug out of the ashes of a fire. With a laugh Awal bit into it, chewing it and offering some to his friend.

"Where did you get it?" asked Juk.

"I dug it up near the fire. It is made of seeds, many of them whole, others bruised to pieces by stones, then all of them mixed with water, I think, and baked in the coals."

The Flint Chipper tried it. "I like it," he said. "Of course it is not meat, but since there is no meat—"

"No meat, but fish," declared Awal.

"Where?"

"Here, close."

"In the pond, yes!"

"No, in that second hut," said Awal. "I have smelled it out."

"Then get it out," Juk replied. "There is a door."

They walked toward the farther pit-house, Awal shaking his head.

"*You* get it out," he suggested.

"Are you afraid?"

"Perhaps I am afraid, but I am surely no fool. This second hut is dark. It is just the thing for a trap."

"The first house was no trap," objected Juk.

"That was maybe to deceive us. No, there is fish in there, and I am still rumbling inside me, but the door I do not go through."

"Let us try the roof," said Juk. "In the other house there was a cord tied to the center pole, and holding roots above the floor. The same could be true of the fish."

Cautiously they knelt down onto the roof of the second hut, testing it for strength. The branches sagged but did not give way.

"It will hold," declared Awal. "We saw women on it, weaving sticks to make a tighter roof. And there is a hole that we could look through."

The roof was practically finished. Upon a framework of leafy branches mud had been smeared, and then horsehide had been put down as an additional protection against cold and bad weather. Only near a hole toward the center of the roof was there still a spot requiring willow withes and a patch of horsehide. The hole itself would not be covered: it was a vent for smoke. Juk and Awal crawled up the inclined roof until they could peep down the smoke hole.

"Too dark," said Awal.

"That is because we have our heads in the hole, and in that way shut out the light," answered Juk. "It is like looking into a hollow log after a rabbit."

"Yet I smell fish stronger than before."

"And I see it, I think. It is hanging from the center pole."

The boys began to rip away the hide and sticks which covered the roof between the smoke hole and the center pole. Tearing and jerking, they made a large opening, then while Awal clung to his friend's legs Juk reached down and seized the fish. It was a sizable thing, dried either by the sun or by smoky fire, and delicious to smell. Awal snatched at it; Juk fell to cramming it into his mouth, ravenously hungry. Soon they were munching contentedly, and Awal was sliding down the roof to the ground.

"Wait, there is something else in this hut," said Juk, peering through the hole they had made.

"More fish?"

"No; it is a round thing that is hollow and meant for a dish, I think."

"A basket," said Awal, picking a fishbone out of his teeth.

"Not a basket, no. It is not made of wood."

"Then it is made of hide, sewn together."

"It is not made of hide," said Juk, staring down into the hut.

"Neither of wood nor of hide?" inquired Awal, faintly interested. "Then it is bark, or hollow bone plugged up at one end."

"No."

"Pah! In that case it is nothing at all. It is a shadow."

"I shall find out," said Juk, clambering off the roof. "I am going inside and get that thing."

Awal shrugged and said nothing; he was busy with the last of his fish. Juk was already at the other side of the hut and hurrying down the runway. He got inside and picked up the strange container. There was a small one, too, that he had not noticed before. Quickly taking possession of them, he came back into the outer air, grinning triumphantly at his friend.

"I told you!" he cried. "Not wood, not bark, not hide, not bone! They appear to be made of earth, of clay or mud which is soft at first and then is dried."

That was it. The bowls were pottery, crude and thick but nevertheless a forerunner of the fine dishes which stand upon the tables of civilized people of today. And again Juk and Awal were surprised, for though their people had containers of various other materials they had never thought of making dishes or bowls or pots out of clay.

"I understand this," murmured Juk. "When clay is moist it gives way, as it does when you step on it at a stream bank. So Ranta's people have fashioned the stuff into the form of pots, then the sun has dried it—no, perhaps the fire has done that. There is a burnt spot here on this big bowl."

"I smell grease," said Awal, sniffing loudly.

"There has been meat in this pot," answered Juk. "No, give it back to me!"

Awal was trying to get hold of the pot, Juk was struggling to keep it for himself. Suddenly the thing broke in two, Awal falling on his back with a piece in his hand. He laughed and began to lick the grease from it, and Juk, in his fury, threw the rest of it at him and then seized the smaller bowl and smashed it on the ground.

"You clumsy bear!" cried the Flint Chipper. "Your snout is everywhere that there is food or the smell of food. Now I have no pot to take home to the others of our people."

"The small pot you broke yourself," grinned Awal. "Either you, or the demon in you, the one that talks and gnashes your teeth when you sleep."

Juk grew sober. He picked up a fragment of pottery, crumbling a bit of it in his hand. It was not pure clay; there were pebbles in it, as well as streaks of sand, and even bits of charred wood.

"How quickly it broke!" he murmured.

"That proves it is no good," said Awal, getting to his feet. "It is like the strings of leaves we sometimes put on our heads—along comes a little breeze and they break."

"You were the breeze this time," grumbled Juk, and

SUDDENLY
THE THING
BROKE IN TWO AND AWAL FELL ON HIS BACK.

he took up another piece of pottery, slipping it carefully into his pouch. "I am going to show this to our people."

"I am hungry," said Awal, glancing about. "If we could catch fish we could cook them."

"And if foxes had wings they could fill their bellies with birds!"

"Let us try fishing from the log yonder," suggested Awal.

"Where is your harpoon?" asked Juk. "Mine is in my pouch, but needs a stick and tendon for lashing."

"Our spears can be our harpoons for once. Come; do you dare to try it, the way Ranta fished?"

"I will show you," retorted Juk, and he started to run toward the pond.

Awal raced after him, getting to the water's edge just in time to seize the end of the log which the Flint Chipper was pushing out from the bank. Juk got astraddle of it, Awal clambered up behind him, and they began to paddle with their spears, as they had seen Ranta do with his hands. For a little while they went smoothly, then the log stopped as though someone had clutched it from behind.

"What is that?" demanded Juk, in a startled tone.

"A leathern rope!" said Awal, glancing back. "They keep it tied to the bushes, to stop it from drifting away. I can attend to that."

Drawing his knife, Awal slashed the rope and they resumed their awkward paddling. Near the bank the water was muddy and filled with reeds and nameless plants, but soon the boys were away from all this. They were approaching the center of the pond, the surface rippling uneasily, the water clear. Once Awal shifted his position and the log came near spilling them into the pond, and this alarmed them.

"Stay quiet," warned Juk. "Do not turn, do not move. If we fall into the water there will be trouble for us."

They gazed down, no longer careless. The boys had ventured out here as a lark, a thoughtless adventure; and now they were beginning to realize what they had done. Neither of them had ever been this far from shore, neither of them could swim. The pond seemed to be without bottom, the bank appeared a tremendous distance away. Worst of all, they remembered the teaching of the elders of their tribe, namely, that deep pools of water were the lair of evil spirits.

"Let us go back," said Juk feebly.

"I—I am still hungry for fish," said Awal, but his voice was very meek.

"Fish is tasteless stuff," said Juk. "I like meat better."

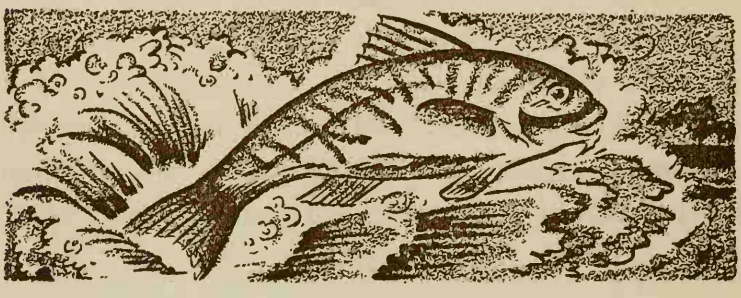
"And I," agreed his friend. "Pah, there are no fish in here! We must turn around and go back."

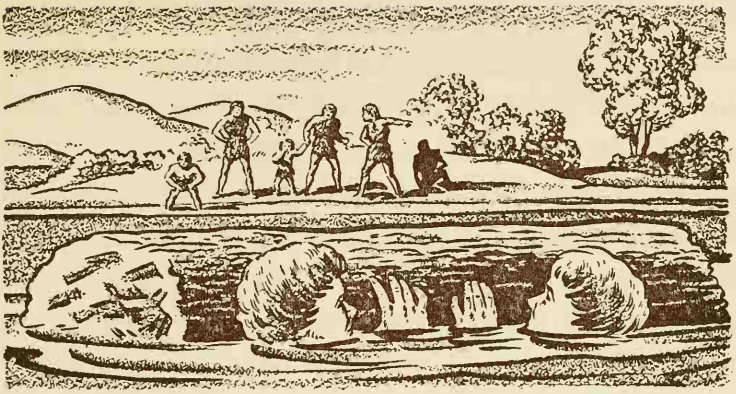
Excellent idea, but how was the log to be turned? Even in the hands of skilled paddlers it would have been an unwieldly craft, and the boys were far from being skilled paddlers. Desperately they worked, cutting into the water with their spears, but failing to send the log where they wanted it to go. As a matter of fact they were drifting down the pond, pulled on by the current which flowed through it from one stream to the other.

Then suddenly they upset. Just what caused it they never knew, but somehow they found themselves in the water, spluttering and gasping, and clinging to the log.

"Climb back on," panted Juk. "There is no bottom under my feet. The pond goes down forever. We could drown in it."

"Wait!" whispered Awal. "I hear voices. Someone has seen us. It is the women and children, over there on the bank. The log is between them and us, but they know we are here, I am sure of that. What are we to do?"





CHAPTER VIII

Awal Dares

"WHAT are we to do?" whispered Awal, and Juk had no answer for him. There was nothing that they could do, save to hide behind the drifting log and wait to see what the women did.

Cries resounded from the shore of the pond.

"I saw something splash!" declared a half-grown child.

"And I," said a woman. "It was an animal."

"Ho, a big fish!"

"Fish! It was too big for a fish. It was an otter!"

Juk and Awal kept out of sight, only their heads above water and these hidden by the log. They could see nothing of the people on the bank, but they could hear plainly. An otter! That was better than being recognized for what they were, although in a way it was bad to be mistaken for an otter. For this aquatic animal was highly prized by primitive man, not only for its rich thick fur but for its oily flesh as well; and certainly the Beast Herders would want to capture so valuable a creature.

"Hold your spear ready," whispered Awal. "They may get another log and come out here."

"No; it is more likely that they will call their men, or perhaps Ranta," said Juk. "Women would never venture out like this. Ha, and I wish that I myself had been as sensible."

The shouts from the bank continued, all the willow gatherers standing in a row and pointing and gesturing toward the log, as it drifted slowly on toward the lower end of the pond.

"Where is it?" demanded a skeptical woman. "I see a log, but nothing more."

"It is behind the log!" insisted a child. "The fur of its head sticks up. I can see it."

Awal jerked down out of sight. He had lifted up to peep at the ones on the bank, and a sharp-eyed child

had seen him. Otters have dark brown fur, and Awal and Juk had hair of an almost identical shade, so that the mistake had been a natural one. Likewise it had been a fortunate mistake.

"Keep down," scolded Juk. "If they see us we are lost. Let us paddle a little. That will help. We are drifting on toward the end of the pond."

"Not too fast," objected Awal. "If we get there before the women move on they will cut around to the end of the pond to see what it really is; and if they do we are lost. Stop paddling, until they go."

"You are right," Juk agreed.

It was an anxious time. The children continued to call out, the women kept gazing and commenting upon the otter and its present whereabouts. Apparently they did not believe that it was behind the log, but they did expect it to show itself in that general neighborhood.

"Gone," said a woman finally. "It swam off the other way."

"An otter would make a warm robe for winter," said another.

"I saw it swim toward the far shore!" declared a child. "Let us take sticks and run around to that side and kill it, then we can cook it in the fire!"

"That would be like chasing swallows," said a woman. "Come, you young ones; you want to escape helping us

with the roofs of the huts, and that you cannot. If there is an otter in the pond it will stay there for the fish it can find, and our men will hunt it and slay it. Come, let us be going."

Juk frowned and shifted his clutch on the log. "Yes, be going," he muttered. "Fix your huts, and leave us alone."

"Go, go," whispered Awal. "Go away, go away, let us be."

The boys felt better after that. They were practicing a bit of magic, not the powerful kind which only wizards could apply. If Juk and Awal had tried to make the women move off when the women wanted to stay, the attempt would have failed; but since the women were already inclined to go, the boys could magically prod them on, by saying the words they had spoken.

"Be going; go away; let us alone," they murmured, and the woman and children on the bank went. Gathering up the withes they had dropped in their excitement over the otter, the willow-gatherers started on again, although slowly, and with many a backward look over their shoulders.

"Careful," warned Awal. "They will watch back this way. Move forward a little, so that the log will hide us well."

Juk stuck his spear down through his belt, made sure

that it was not going to slip out, and worked forward a little. Hand over hand he advanced along toward the front end of the log, Awal following him. The women were trudging on their way to camp, the children hanging back but nevertheless following.

"We must get away before they see we have been at the huts," said Juk.

"That does not matter," said Awal confidently. "They will think we fled back toward the hills. It will not seem sensible to them that we should be out here."

"We were fools to do it," sighed the Flint Chipper. "I am wet and there is still no bottom under my feet. Also the bank is far away."

"You are gloomy, like people at the end of summer and the beginning of dull winter," chuckled Awal. "The bank is nearer and nearer. Soon we shall be on land.

They paddled as best they could, and between their clumsy efforts and the current the log moved closer to the end of the pond. The water was no longer clear, and it seemed to Awal that it was not quite so cold as it had been. There were cat-tails and sedges ahead and beyond these there was the shore, firm and inviting. All at once Juk gave a little cry.

"Did something bite you?" demanded Awal uneasily.

"No; my feet have found bottom under them!" said Juk. "I know we are all right now."

"Yes," laughed Awal, "unless Ranta has heard us and is waiting among the reeds yonder!"

"Why do you say that?" asked the Flint Chipper.

"Ah, who knows why people say things!" said Awal. "But in the middle of the pond you were the one to be gloomy and fear trouble; now we are close to the bank, and I am the one to have suspicions. This Ranta could have heard the women and children; he could have come to find out about it."

"Then be silent," cautioned Juk. "Until we get on solid ground we are not safe."

Awal hushed. There was work to do. The log had caught in a tangle of reeds, no longer drifting freely; and while the boys now and then felt bottom under them it was still too squashy and uncertain for them to trust. Accordingly they grasped what they could of sedges and cat-tails and pulled hard, in this way forcing the log to move nearer the bank. Soon the bottom of the pond was firmer; they stood up on it, timidly at first, and then with assurance. Juk let go the log and began to wade ashore.

"Wait for me," said Awal.

"Are you afraid of the demon of the water?" Juk grinned.

"Not so much as you are, or you would not hurry so!" Awal retorted.

Juk floundered on, higher and higher out of the water. He got to dry ground and sank down upon it, dripping wet but satisfied. In a moment Awal joined him, hair streaming down over his eyes, but a grin on his face.

"We have done a clever thing," announced Awal, sitting down to rest. "Karakaa would not dare to do such a thing."

"Nor you, again!" said Juk.

"And you?" inquired Awal.

"I stay on dry ground after this," said the Flint Chipper frankly. He looked across the pond toward the camp of the strangers. "We must get away from here, lest the women raise an alarm."

"Come, then," nodded Awal. "I am rested."

They made their way through the reeds, striking open ground at the southwest corner of the pond. The sound of a voice came to them.

"Wait," said Juk, crouching down. "It is Ranta, I think."

"He should be on the east side of the stream," objected Awal.

"If he is not on the east side he is on this side," Juk reminded him. "H'm, there he is, down the valley a little way. I cannot see him, but I see the horses. They are grazing."

"Horses are generally grazing," said Awal. "What

touches us is not the horses but Ranta—and the dog. Do you see the dog?"

"No, but we can cut west to the hills and then north and around to our cave. The dog will not bother us."

There was a slow strange smile on Awal's lips. "That is true," he murmured. "The dog will not bother us. We are the ones who will bother the dog."

"What?" exclaimed Juk.

"I have a grudge against this Ranta," said Awal deliberately. "He bruised me with a rock, so I will bruise him inside, and then we shall be even."

"Inside? Where?"

"In the place where he feels pleasure," replied Awal. "He likes the dog, and perhaps treasures him as we treasure our spears. I will take his dog and have revenge on Ranta."

"Ha, you can't do that! You do not dare."

"I dare," said Awal grimly.

"What is your plan for getting the dog?" asked Juk, still wide-eyed.

"The plan will come to me when I see the brute. Come and I will show you."

The boys began to slip off to the west, keeping bushes and tall grass between themselves and the horse herder. Ranta was singing to himself, or perhaps to the dog; there was no telling which.

"That noise he makes," muttered Awal, "it is a good thing, like a partridge drumming when you go to slip up on it. Let him sing; he will soon howl."

"Why howl?" asked Juk.

"Because he will have no dog, then when he sees it is dead he will know better than to roll rocks down upon me again."

Juk said no more for a time, but after they had gained the shelter of a thicket of white-flowered bushes and had halted to get their bearings, Juk said:

"How will you kill the dog without getting arrows in your hide?"

"Arrows!" exclaimed Awal in contempt. "Pah, they are only for grouse, not for people."

"Perhaps they are for people, too."

"Arrows or not, I am taking revenge today," said Awal. "Now we shall slip down behind these bushes and come to a point west of the horses. The wind will be toward us, and thus it will give us scent and in turn keep our own scent from Ranta. And when we flee we shall flee off to the west, where there are hills and trails that we know. Follow me and I will show you something."

Juk went along in silence. He had no particular objection to Awal's scheme, indeed he rather favored it. Ranta was a stranger, and hence an enemy. According

to the code of that savage day it was not only permissible to injure an enemy, it was actually a duty. To kill or steal from a member of your own tribe, that was a crime; but offenses against strangers were honorable and something to be proud of. These things Juk knew very well, and he approved them; on the other hand, he did not quite like the notion of killing the dog. The Flint Chipper had a substitute plan, which he meant to propose to Awal, when the time was ripe.

"Now we are far enough south," whispered Awal, and he nodded toward the horse herder. "I think Ranta is under that mulberry tree. Ha, he has turned into a bird!"

The young herder was singing, although Juk and Awal were still too far away to recognize the words. Awal's eyes roved to and fro, studying the lay of the land; Juk thought of his plan to keep the dog from being killed.

"How will you kill the dog?" he asked. "If you hurl your spear you will lose it, since it will go too close to Ranta for you to venture after it."

"I will kill the dog and also keep my spear," said Awal, but Juk saw that his friend was more confident than wise, and so the Flint Chipper said further:

"If you throw your spear you are not sure of finishing the brute. Suppose we catch him?"

"Ho, that is a plan!" grinned Awal, then he sobered. "Yes, but how catch him?"

"We can lure him into the brush by imitating meadow mice. He will come to hunt them, and we can then fall upon him."

"That is all on the tongue," retorted Awal, meaning that the scheme sounded well but would not work. "I will cast my spear. Come, I am moving forward."

They began to creep toward the mulberry tree, and now they heard Ranta clearly, as he sang a song which he made up line by line:

"My horses crop grass
The sun shines down.
I smell the earth
And am happy—ho, ho, ho!"

"Happy," grunted Awal. "I will make you unhappy, the way you made me with that rock."

Ranta stopped singing and began to talk to the dog. He said to the creature:

"So you do not know why ducks can swim but pheasants cannot! You are stupid, dog, stupid like the two boys we met in the hills! I will tell you. In the beginning the ducks were like land birds and had no webbed feet with which to paddle, but they longed to eat fish and so they asked the spirit of the pond to give them fish,

but the spirit said you will have to swim and catch your own fish; and the ducks said we cannot because our feet are not fit for paddling. Whereupon the spirit said he would web their feet if the ducks would give him their tail feathers to tie on the end of his arrows and thus help them fly straight to the mark, and the ducks agreed. So the thing was done, and after that the ducks had webbed feet and could swim, but they have never since had tail feathers; and since this made them ridiculous in the sight of land birds the ducks ever afterward kept to the high air, or, when they came down, they settled only upon water, and stayed hidden among the reeds, so that such birds as partridges and pheasants would not make fun of them. Now I will sing again."

There was a growl from the dog, and Ranta was angry.

"You do not like my song?" he demanded, and threw a rock at the brute. "Keep still and listen, or I will break ribs for you!"

Juk and Awal paused, for the dog had let out a howl and had run off a little way, and the boys were not sure of where the animal would go. Then Ranta sang another song, making it up as he went along.

"I am young and my heart is strong,
In summer I herd, in winter I hunt;
When there is fighting to do,
I fight with the others—ho, ho, ho, ho!"

"He must know we are near," said Awal, with a frown; "but no matter."

"Wait a little," whispered Juk. "He is yawning. I think he will soon go to sleep."

"Good, then I can kill Ranta himself."

"That would be too risky to try," said Juk hurriedly. "He lies in an open spot and would wake up before you could get to him. The dog would warn him, too."

"Maybe the dog will go to sleep."

"I have a plan that is better than the one I had before," said Juk. "Listen to me."

"Tell it," grunted Awal, "but the other plan was folly. Wait, he is talking again. This is strange, to talk to a dog as if the dog were human. I still think this rascal is a wizard, young but learning his art."

Juk gestured for him to be silent. They heard Ranta call drowsily to the dog:

"I am stiff from last night's sleep in the hut. The earth inside the pit is still damp; it needs the fire of many days and nights before the chill is baked out of the ground. I woke many times, so now I must sleep a little to catch up. Wake me if the horses stray."

Awal nudged his friend. "Do you hear? He has power over the dog, and sets him to watch while he himself sleeps."

"It is just talk," said Juk uneasily. "And anyhow,

the horses are mostly lying down, and the dog need not stir. My scheme is this: the dog will sleep, Ranta will sleep. Ranta would awaken if we tried to rush him, but the dog is nearer brush, and we can slip upon it before it knows. Let us seize the dog and carry it off, not killing it but making it captive. That will satisfy your need for revenge."

"How will it?" said Awal doubtfully.

"Why, it will enrage Ranta to know that we have his dog. He will hate it worse than seeing the brute dead under his eyes."

Awal grinned. "That is true," he nodded. "We shall do it. Follow me, and do not speak. Signal with your face and hands, not your tongue."

"You likewise," said Juk dryly.

They started toward the dog, going on hands and knees and keeping behind bushes. There was no more from Ranta; he appeared to be asleep. Laboriously Juk and Awal crept on, sniffing and twitching their noses in the effort to smell out the dog. Awal jerked his head to one side and they changed direction, more and more cautious. Now they had the scent of the brute they were after.

A low whine came to their ears.

"Dreaming," said Juk, by means of pantomime.

"Yes," nodded Awal. The dog must be asleep, twitch-

ing and whining after the custom of wolves and jackals when they nap in the sun.

The whining, whimpering sound continued at intervals, and between this and the dog's scent the boys knew exactly where to go. It was not much farther. A clump of cranberry bushes rose up in front of them, and beyond this there was a clear space, where the sun shone down and where, very likely, the dog was lying.

"I see him," gestured Awal suddenly.

"And I see him," answered Juk, and drew his brows into a warning knot. "Take care!"

Slowly Awal made ready. He made sure that his spear was not going to fall out of his belt; he glanced at his knife; he got carefully to his feet, hands empty and ready.

"Watch Ranta," he signaled.

"I will," Jug signaled back. "And you, look out that dog does not bark."

Awal made a sign to indicate that he would throttle the beast. He crept stealthily forward, Juk listening for Ranta but also watching his friend. The dog was asleep, but twitching restlessly, its black lips jerking as though it wanted to say something and could not think of the words.

Then Awal pounced. With a noiseless leap he had covered the distance between Juk and the dog, and was

gripping the animal about the neck. Instantly the dog was awake and struggling, while Awal lifted it off the ground and turned to flee.

"Follow me," whispered Juk. "We must get into the hills. Hold him fast!"

That was what Awal was trying to do, but the dog was powerful and his heart fierce, and before Awal could prevent it the brute had managed to let out a strangled bark.

"Now we shall have to run for it!" exclaimed Juk. "That will awaken Ranta."

Awal was fighting the dog, holding it from behind and doing his best to avoid its claws. He ran awkwardly because of his burden, and Juk, gazing back in his uneasiness, saw that Ranta was on his feet, bow and arrow in hand.

"He is up, and busy with eyes and nose," said Juk hastily. "We must go faster."

"I am going as fast as I can!" grunted Awal.

Perhaps he was, but it was not fast enough. Ranta darted to where the dog had been sleeping, saw Awal's footprints, and guessed the truth. Whirling round, he caught sight of the two fugitives, and at once set out in pursuit, his eyes blazing with wrath.

"Halt!" he shouted. "Drop my dog or I will pierce you!"

"Run," panted Juk, ducking on through the brush. "He is going to let fly an arrow."

"Pah!" said Awal contemptuously. "Let him shoot. I am no grouse, sitting still as a rock on the ground. I know how to run; I can dodge. Ho, ho!"

An arrow had darted past them, missing by the breadth of a man's outstretched arms and burying itself in the ground. Juk kept on toward the foothills, glancing back over his shoulder whenever he could. It was not far to the shelter of country where Ranta could neither track them nor see them flee, but the trouble was that the horse herder was gaining on Awal.

"He will get you," warned Juk. "Let the dog go, then you can escape."

"No," said Awal stubbornly. "I have his dog and I shall keep it; otherwise he would laugh at me, and he has already done that."

Ranta was maneuvering for another shot. He stopped following them in a direct line and sprang toward a little hill, from the top of which he would have a clear view of the two who were hurrying into the underbrush. Awal saw him and grinned, thinking that Ranta merely intended to see where they were going; then the young stranger fitted an arrow to his bow and pulled strongly back. Bothered by the dog in his arms, Awal stumbled over a creeping vine, and by the time he recovered him-

self it was too late. The arrow was speeding from the bow; in a panic Awal ran on, but the arrow struck him in the back and he fell to the ground.

"I am hit!" he cried, and struggled to his feet, still clutching the dog.

"Keep running," said Juk, racing back to take him by the arm. "He will give up the chase if he sees you can still travel."

"There is an arrow in my back," moaned Awal. "Take the dog. I will come."

Juk seized the brute and hurried on, Awal stumbling along behind. The horse herder was giving up, no longer pursuing them but only shouting threats. His voice grew fainter, and at last they could not hear it at all. Then Awal sank down, and as soon as Juk had bound the dog, foot and snout, he came to his friend.

"It is nothing," said the Flint Chipper. "The thing struck the edge of the shoulder blade. I can draw it out —if it is not barbed."

"Draw it out, and do your talking later," growled Awal.

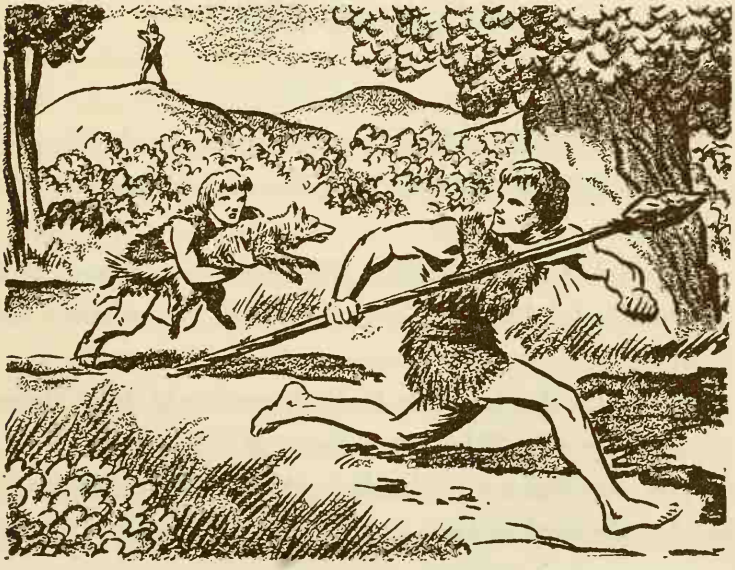
A moment to study the arrow, then with a quick jerk Juk had it out. There was a howl from Awal, whereupon Juk laughed:

"You said an arrow was nothing! It could hurt only grouse, you said!"

Awal got to his feet. "Let us get to the cave," he said sourly. "I will not give up the dog, and he may follow us."

"I will keep the arrow," smiled Juk, putting it carefully through his belt. "This is what I have been wanting."

Juk took the dog in his arms and they pushed on as rapidly as Awal could travel. North and then east across familiar ravines they made their way, and afterward they struck the trail which led to the cave. And all the while they did not know that they would find the cave empty; it had been abandoned.



CHAPTER IX

Mud into Men

SUSPECTING nothing, the boys came to the foot of the cliff and shouted up at Karakaa. There was no answer.

"Ha ha!" laughed Awal. "The chief has seen our wild dog and is frightened, Karakaa and all the others with him!"

"Take the brute while I climb up," said Juk, "then after I am up I will let down the rope."

The rope was a stout leathern thong which the Hunting People used to haul game and firewood up to their

cave, but when Juk reached the ledge he did not bother to lower this rope. He was startled to find no one about. Where were the rest of the tribe?

"What are you doing?" Awal called up to him.

"I am looking for our people," replied Juk. "They are gone!"

"Gone?" echoed Awal. "Are you sure?"

Not exactly, but it was not long before Juk *was* sure. He darted into the cave, noticed that the robes and food buckets were gone, and rushed back to the ledge.

"Yes, they have fled!" he exclaimed, clambering hastily down to join Awal. "Even the sleeping robes are gone!"

"H'm," said Awal, and looked worried. "If the robes are missing, then they have moved camp, abandoning the cave for an open-air station, as we always do in summer. Yet it is a little earlier than usual."

"I think the same," replied Juk. "Let us seek them out. It is coming night, and we do not want to go through another darkness alone."

They put down the dog and fell to exploring the ground, seeking tracks of the ones who had gone. It was a simple matter. One or two or three people might have walked away from the cave without leaving a trail, but this was impossible for a whole tribe. In no time at all the boys had found the footprints they wanted

and were striding off into the woods with the dog. The way led northeast, a natural line of retreat because of the location of the camp of the Beast Herders. Northeast there was a tangle of hills, thickets without end, and very few game trails to tempt a wandering hunter.

"I see them," said Juk presently. "It is the place where we stayed last summer."

Awal raised his voice, calling triumphantly:

"Ho, but you must see what we have! A wild dog, a creature that I captured with my own hands!"

"And a creature that I helped you carry," said Juk, laughing shortly.

The Hunting People came to meet them, their eyes wide and their mouths spilling over with talk. They asked questions, they said things about the dog, then Karakaa demanded to know where they had been.

"Goort told us to catch this Ranta," said Awal, tossing down the dog. "We slept in Two-hole Cave and this morning we chased him."

"Catching a dog instead of Ranta!" snorted the wizard.

"True," grinned Awal, and stirred the dog with his foot. "Look! He wants to break loose, but he is tightly bound!"

Juk turned to the women. "Is there meat to eat?" he asked.

"A bit of marmot meat and these bird's eggs; no more."

The boys gobbled down what they could get their hands on, then suddenly Juk bethought himself of the arrow. He took it from his pouch and held it aloft, chuckling:

"Here is an arrow of the kind that the Beast Herders use! I wanted one, and now I have it. It is the arrow that Ranta shot into Awal's back."

"I had forgotten that," growled Awal, wincing a little.

The wizard had been gazing at the dog, but now he jerked round to stare at the arrow, his lips twisting.

"So that is one of their arrows?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"I will take it," said Goort, striding forward. "Hand it over."

Juk was angry, but he did not dare show it. "Why do you want it?" he asked. "It is mine. I am going to make arrows like it."

"Give it to me," said the wizard sternly, and Juk surrendered it. The men crowded up about Goort, for weapons were a vastly important thing in their lives, and few of them had seen an arrow close at hand. They gazed at it, noting every detail. The shaft was of seasoned ash wood, long as a man's arm between the wrist and the shoulder, and was made smoothly round by

scraping with a bit of flint. The butt end was notched and also provided with a feather which appeared to have come from a quail, the feather serving to help the arrow fly true. The other end of the shaft was supplied with a flint head, so crudely made that Juk forgot his anger against Goort the wizard. The boy blinked at the arrowhead in wonder: it was a sharp flake, one of those chips that shatter off a piece of flint when you strike it briskly with a hammering stone. Here and there the flake had been chipped to improve its shape, but for the most part it had remained an untouched fragment.

"Why, those Beast Herders cannot chip flint with skill!" exclaimed Juk. "They are clever in many things, but not at stone chipping. A half-grown child could make a better arrowhead than that. Let me see it, Goort."

"No," said the wizard tersely. "It would be dangerous for you to have this arrow."

"Why?"

"For the reason that it is a weapon, made and used by our enemies. They could work magic into it, even though it is out of their hands; and the magic could slay us. I will keep it in my pouch, and later I shall do a charm against it."

Here the wizard opened his pouch, found the arrow too long, and broke it in two. Calmly he stuffed the

pieces out of sight, paying no attention to Juk's protests.

"You must do that," Karakaa was telling the wizard. "Make a charm, so that none of their arrows will hurt us. Before now, all the arrows we knew were made by the thickset little hill people, and none of the things went to their mark; but it seems the Beast Herders shoot well, so we must take care."

"They are evil," declared Goort. "That is why I had you and the others move here, away from the cave."

"So the wizard did it," Awal murmured in Juk's ear. "He is always making trouble."

"That is true as running water," answered the Flint Chipper. "He took my prize."

"You still have your piece of pottery," laughed Awal.

Juk smiled. He had forgotten the fragment. Quickly he reached into his pouch and drew it out, saying to the people of the tribe:

"Here is another thing, and none of you can tell what it is, unless I tell you first!"

"It is nothing," declared Big Foot.

"A piece of stone," said Karakaa.

"No, it is part of a bowl or pot," grinned Juk, and he told the tale of the huts of the Beast Herders; how they dwelt in holes covered with roofs, and how in one such house he had found two pots made of clay. "We

broke them, Awal and I," he continued; "but this is left."

The men shrugged and gave little heed, but the women came forward, wanting to hear more. They asked about the huts and they passed the fragment of pottery from hand to hand, chattering like birds—until a certain woman broke the fragment in two, whereupon there was a shout of derisive laughter.

"A pot? That was a bowl, a container?" they cried. "What foolish talk! It is too soft. Pots made of clay would be worthless."

There was nothing that Juk could say; indeed, he did not want to defend the notion of pots made of clay. He agreed with the women: the things were too easily broken, and therefore they were inferior to containers made of bark or hide.

Juk's people were a nomadic hunting people, having no use for fragile things. Not until men learned to plant grain and make settled homes would pottery really come into its glory, even the partly-settled Beast Herders preferring dishes of wood, bark, or hide. Thus the people of Karakaa's tribe were not stupid in their ridicule of pottery; they were sensible and intelligent. Pottery was meant for a later age, not theirs.

"What is this mark?" said a woman, and peered at the edge of the clay fragment Juk had brought home.

Everyone looked at the mark. It had been made while the clay was still soft, and it resembled many little waves on a pond. Nashad gave his opinion.

"It is a finger print," he said. "The clay was soft, someone set a finger against it, the clay dried and held the mark."

Goort took the piece of clay, holding it up so as to catch the light of the fading day.

"A fingerprint," he agreed, and leered cunningly. "This is our chance. Now we shall be able to defeat our enemies!"

"How?" demanded Karakaa.

"By magic," said the wizard. "I will explain, since you others are blind to such things. A man's shadow is part of a man, his toenails are part of him, his hair and footprints are part of him. If you can catch any of these things, and they are clear and strong, you can use them in magic. If I thrust a knife through your foot it hurts you; if I thrust a knife through my enemy's fingerprint it will hurt him. Therefore if we destroy this fingerprint we shall be destroying the person who made the print."

"Ah, but destroying one person is not enough!" objected a voice. It was Talker, who had been asleep under a bush, but awakening now, was ready to help with the conversation. "Our enemies are many, not one."

"Silence, and listen to me further," said Goort. "I shall make many little images out of mud, and these images shall represent the fighting men of the people camped by the pond. In this mud I shall mix bits of the clay containing this fingerprint, and the two together—mud image and fingerprint, will be the same as the Beast Herders. Then I shall say a charm and destroy all the images, and this will bring about the death of our enemies." *

The tribesmen nodded, all save Talker.

"I am an old man," he said, "and I remember that once you made clay images of our enemies and the enemies did not die. They were people who came in between us and a reindeer herd we had been chasing, and—"

"Every leaf on a tree is different," interrupted Goort; "every case of magic is different. Say no more. In the morning, I shall get mud and make the images and you shall see what I can do."

"Yes, we shall see," said Talker, and no one knew whether he was scoffing or trying to believe.

It was growing dark. The women went out to gather firewood for the night, the children began to stare fearfully at the shadows of rock and tree, the men sat about

* This bit of primitive logic is well known to all students of magic and folklore. Cases have been found throughout the world, and were known in England in very recent times, as the famous novelist Thomas Hardy testifies. *Author.*

chatting and planning. They talked of hunting and food, and of their enemies the Beast Herders. Ranta had not been caught, his people had not gone away. Karakaa and his warriors were uneasy. Something must be done.

"I will destroy them with my magic," said the wizard, and after that there was a certain measure of comfort for the Hunting People. They were peace-loving and avoided war whenever possible. The age of bold fighting had not yet dawned upon the world; primitive people were for long ages too timid and poorly armed to rush into a battle which could be avoided.

"Look at my dog," smiled Awal, sitting at the fire beside Juk. "He never stops twisting."

No wonder! The dog was still bound fast, thongs about its feet and also its muzzle. The boys looked at the creature, studying it casually. It was doubtless hungry and thirsty, yet it never occurred to them even so much as to untie it. Sympathy for dumb animals was utterly unknown to Awal and Juk and their kind.

"That is a strong dog," observed Juk. "He makes the thongs stretch when he squirms. Maybe he will get loose in the night."

"No, he will not," said Awal grimly, and he went to the dog and tightened its bonds.

Night shut down. Awal began to feel pain in his back, where the arrow had struck him. He spoke to a woman

who was clever at treating such things, and the woman took herbs from her pouch and made a poultice of them, and this poultice she put against Awal's back. The boy grunted and said no more about it. Wounds were a common occurrence; unless they bothered you the thing to do was to let them alone, and in time they would probably heal. If they did not heal, then they got worse and it was a good idea to do something about them.

"An arrow wound is nothing," said Awal, and to show that he did not mind the pain he lay down and slept all night on his back.

Juk slept beside him, and the next morning prodded at the wound with his fingers, asking:

"Is it all right?"

"I have forgotten it," said Awal. "Which shoulder was it that Ranta pierced with his arrow?"

"It was your tongue," retorted Juk. "He pierced it and twisted it in such fashion that you say false things. The wound is all right now, but last night it must have hurt you."

"Ho ho, there is my dog," said Awal, wanting to change the subject. "What, is he going to struggle again, wanting to get loose?"

The people of the tribe were stirring, some of them starting off to hunt for food, others picking up the

remnants of last night's supper. It was always that way. When there was plenty to eat you gulped down what you wanted, and discarded the rest, never thinking of it again—until your hunger returned.

"Let us see if the dog will eat," suggested Juk.

They unbound his muzzle but he refused to touch the bone that Awal offered him. The thongs on his legs seemed to annoy him, and accordingly they tied him to a tree with a stout piece of leather and freed his legs. Instantly he was on his feet, bounding first in one direction and then in another, in the vain attempt to escape. The boys laughed and laughed, and Goort scolded them.

"Be silent," scowled the wizard. "I am going into the woods for the mud I need, and since the making of magical images is sacred work you had better hold in your noise. Noise offends the spirits."

The boys quieted down, but soon the wizard was out of sight, and their eyes went back to the dog. Karakaa and several men stood in a circle, grinning at the brute and urging Awal to go up to it with a bone.

"You want it to bite me," said Awal wisely.

"No," said Talker. "The dog will bite the bone."

Awal thought it over, and decided to try. He took up a marmot bone and advanced toward the dog. Snarling fiercely, the dog retreated and retreated, but when

Awal was close enough, and there was slack in the dog's rope, the beast sprang at the boy, mouth wide open. With a yell of surprise Awal tried to get away, and could not. The dog knocked him over and fell to biting him, Awal shouting and beating it off, while the onlookers rocked with laughter. It was rough fun, and exactly the kind they appreciated. At last Awal got out of the dog's reach, his forearms dripping blood where the dog had bitten him. Screams of laughter rose from the men, and likewise from the women, whereupon Awal turned livid with rage. He did not mind the bites, and he did not mind the men laughing at him, but to be ridiculed by women—that was too much. Drawing his flint dagger, he started toward the dog, crying:

"I will kill the brute!"

"Wait," said Juk, coming between Awal and the dog. "It is your dog and you can do with it as you like, but think of what will happen if you finish it."

"Eh?" growled Awal. "What will happen? It will be dead, that is all."

"The dog will be dead and you will have no pet," Juk reminded him.

"Pah, who wants a pet!" retorted Awal. "Move out of my way."

"A pet is no good, perhaps," countered Juk, "but you will not be able to plague Ranta."

"What?"

"Ranta, I said. It is his dog, and if he never sees it with you he will think it escaped. That will please him; what will irk him is to know you are keeping the brute."

Awal hesitated. He still wanted to kill the dog; on the other hand, he recognized the truth of what Juk had said. And while he hesitated the wizard came into the camp. That settled it. The boys must be quiet, respectful and attentive to the magic which Goort was to do. Juk beckoned to Awal, and they went and sat down under a tree.

"I begin," said Goort, gazing about; "but first let the women and children draw back, so that their breath will not drift to the mud I work with. The breath of women and children is weak, and it would make the images weak."

The women and children obeyed, then the wizard went to work, all the tribesmen watching him with grave faces. On a large burdock leaf Goort had placed a dab of mud the size of his two fists. He went to the stream near the camp, returning with his cupped palms full of water. Making a hole in the mud with his elbow he let the water into the depression and began to mix.

"Where is the bit of pottery which held the finger-mark?" Juk whispered to his friend.

"In the mud, I think," said Awal. "Hush, or he will be angry."

The wizard kept on with the clay until it was neither too soft nor too hard, then he pinched it off into little chunks and began to roll and mold these chunks into the semblance of a human figure. Crude little arms and stumpy legs and misshapen heads he made in turn, placing each image on the burdock leaf as he finished it. He pulled the last bit of clay into shape, laid it at the end of the row and took up the burdock leaf.

"I will dry the images," he announced. "The sun will harden them, and while the sun is doing that I will go into the woods and choose thorns."

Goort carried the images to a sunny spot, put them down, and stalked off among the trees. Everyone watched him, relaxing the moment he was out of sight. A wizard is a fine thing, no doubt; but he is not always a pleasant person to have around.

"The air grows clearer," said Juk meaningly.

"Yes, even the dog feels better," said Awal. "Perhaps the brute is afraid of wizards."

Juk looked at the dog, smiling a little. The boy said to the creature:

"Are you afraid of wizards? You should be used to them, for there are certainly makers of magic among Ranta's people. Have you seen much magic? Or per-

haps dogs are not interested in spells and charms, having no sense to know their use."

All at once Juk fell silent. He looked up and saw Awal gazing at him strangely. The Flint Chipper understood. They had scoffed at Ranta for talking to a four-foot, and now Juk himself was doing the same thing! The boy was embarrassed.

"I was going to speak of the arrow Ranta shot at you," he said hurriedly. "It was bound to the shaft with sinew, and this was well done, but the chipping was the poorest I have ever seen."

Suddenly there was a cry from the women. A child had wandered over to the clay images and was picking up one of them. The mother ran to the child and jerked it back, hastily replacing the image on the burdock leaf.

"That could be an evil thing," said Karakaa sternly. "Let all children stay back out of the way."

Juk nodded toward the woods. "A narrow miss," he murmured. "I see Goort coming! If he had seen the child there would have been trouble."

The wizard stalked back into camp. In his hand he held two large thorns. Silently he went to the clay images, brought them to where the men of the tribe were waiting, put them down and showed a thorn.

"These images are our enemies," he said. "They are bits of mud turned into men, and now I shall pierce each

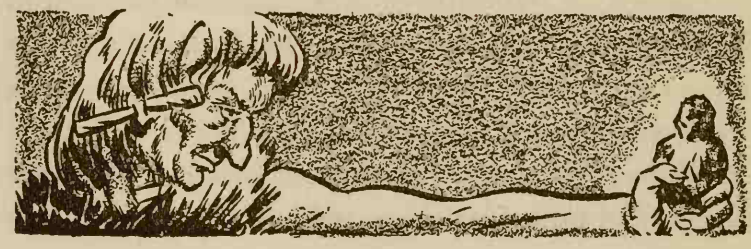
with a thorn, the image dying therefrom and the death of our enemies following quickly upon the death of the images representing them."

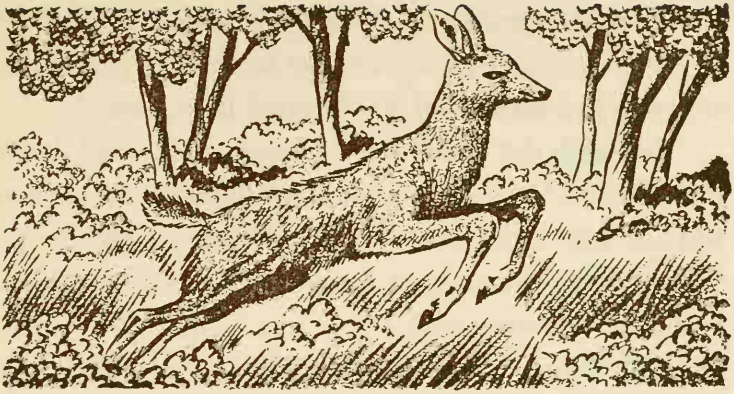
There was a stark silence. Goort took an image in his left hand, jabbed it with a thorn, and threw the clay figurine into the brush. He took up the next image and pierced it in similar fashion, and with every other clay image he did the same, until all of them had been stabbed with a thorn and tossed away, broken and magically dead. No one spoke, no one moved. The Hunting People stared solemnly at their wizard, submissive and grateful for what he had done.

"That is all," said Goort at last. "Our enemies are soon to die, soon to leave us in peace."

Juk heaved a sigh of relief, then he jerked round, a suspicious sound in his ears. The dog was disappearing in the woods, fleeing back toward the camp of the Beast Herders.

"Ho!" cried the Flint Chipper. "The brute chewed his thong in two! He has escaped us, Awal!"





CHAPTER X

Queer Feeling Inside

EVERY man to his weapons," said Karakaa. "We must hunt for food again. Hunger is like running water, it never stops."

Juk and Awal took their spears and went off with the rest of the tribesmen, but all the while they were thinking of the dog, not of game. The boys had captured Ranta's pet, and it had escaped them. The going of the dog depressed them, so much so that later in the day Awal stumbled over a sleeping fawn and let it bound up and get away unhurt.

"Have you grown thick-witted?" Big Foot stormed at the boy. "You have a chance to spear a young deer and yet you stand and gawk until it is gone!"

"Yes, and the fawn would have meant full bellies for us," said Nashad. "Now we shall have to eat roots, and the few hedgehogs that Karakaa has killed."

"Let us go home," said Karakaa shortly. "Awal does nothing but scare game."

Awal did not reply to these taunts, but after they were back at camp and their meager supper was blackening in the fire, he said to Juk:

"It was the fault of the dog."

"I know," said Juk, and he took up a twig and tossed it moodily into the fire. "I understand."

"Do you?" asked his friend, in surprise. "How can that be, when it happened to me!"

"You missed spearing the fawn because you were thinking of the dog," said Juk; "and I stumbled upon no fawn but nevertheless I see how it happened to you that you let it escape. Our wits were clogged by so much pondering, as feet are sometimes clogged by too many brambles in the trail. I miss that dog."

"And *I* do," said Awal, adding gruffly: "It was a miserable brute, and if I could get hold of it again I would take it by the hind legs and dash it to death against a tree trunk."

So said Awal, but neither he nor Juk believed what he had said. They had grown fond of the dog and they missed it keenly. The gruff things that Awal said were mere pretense, to cover his feelings. Ah, that last was important! In the primitive days of Juk and Awal men were always fearful lest they seem weak, and such things as pity and sympathy and affection were generally held to be signs of weakness and unmanliness. Thus Awal was covering up, and Juk did likewise saying with apparent contempt:

"It was a useless thing, that dog. We could never have taken it with us on the hunt, because it would have barked and scared the game."

"You are right," said Awal heavily.

Juk sighed. "Let us stop talking about so silly a beast as the dog," he suggested. "We should talk about sensible things, such as hedgehogs roasting in the coals, and weapons. Do you think Goort will give back my arrow?"

"Who knows!" shrugged Awal.

"Anyhow," said the Flint Chipper, "we have Ranta's hatchet. I am going to examine it and see if the hole in the butt end was made by men or not. Look!"

The young flint chipper was trying to divert himself and Awal, and for a time he succeeded. Cutting away the sinews which bound the stone head to the wooden

handle of Ranta's hatchet, Juk struck the thing a sharp hard blow which loosened the head in its hole. He removed the stone, felt of the inside of the hole, peered at it, and grinned at Awal:

"It is the way I suspected. This hole did not happen, it was made. The Beast Herders would have to search the woods and valleys for more summers than there are hairs in a horse's tail before they could find enough handles with holes already in them. They did not do that. Instead they took stout limbs and bored holes like this."

"How?" asked Awal, faintly interested.

"I cannot say, but probably in a manner similar to our bone-boring. We take a long sliver of flint and twirl it between our palms with the sharp end down against the bone to be bored; the same could be done with a hatchet handle. Clever!"

Awal frowned. "Why is it clever? These Beast Herders I do not like. And Ranta I hate."

"I am going to put this stone head back into the handle," said Juk, and he spoke hastily, knowing very well that Awal was thinking of Ranta's dog again. "I will lash it into place and try it in cutting a small tree. That will prove which of us is right."

"Which of us is right!" Awal exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"Why," said Juk, "you think the hatchet no good; I think it is better than ours, because the head is exactly in the center line, and also the edge is ground even, whereas our hatchets are chipped to a wavy edge, and the head is lashed to the side of the handle. Let us have a trial, I with Ranta's hatchet, you with yours."

"I will do it and win," declared Awal. "I took Ranta's dog from him, and I can outchop his hatchet."

Juk lashed the stone head into place, and they rose and went to make the test. Not far from the fire there were two young birches, each of a bigness to be encircled by a man's thumb and forefinger put upon it from either side. The Flint Chipper chose one of these trees, Awal took the other. They fell to chopping, the blows falling fast and heavy, one after the other. No one bothered them: the hedgehogs were by this time at least half-cooked, and the people of the tribe were snatching the meat from the coals, glad to have Awal and Juk absorbed in something else, so that they themselves could have more to eat. Whack whack, whack whack! went the stone hatchets, then one of the birches toppled and fell. It was Awal's.

"Huh," grunted the winner. "That hatchet of Ranta's is good for nothing. I won."

They turned back to the fire, Juk puzzled.

"I do not understand it," he said. "A hatchet with

its edge ground down to a straight line should cut better than one of ours. I think you won because there was hate of Ranta in you, and that gave you strength. Yes, I am sure of it. Also I am sure the new hatchet is better than our old ones."

Goort scowled up at them. He sat cross-legged at the fire, munching a piece of half-burned meat.

"The new hatchet better?" he muttered. "No."

"I think it is," said Juk.

"You think falsely," insisted the wizard. "New things are dangerous and are best left alone. In the forest it is always the strange thing which deceives us, because we are ignorant of what it is, and means, and can do. Old things have grown familiar, and we know how to handle them; the new is a tricky thing, a trap. You had better throw that hatchet away, before it makes trouble."

"Perhaps you are right," said Juk discreetly, but in his heart he thought the wizard wrong. Like all his people, Juk lived in a maze of superstitious fear and narrow intolerant custom, yet he had seen new things turn out to be right and useful, and his common sense told him that Ranta's hatchet was probably one of these.

"All the meat gone," grumbled Awal, picking up a bone that some one had thrown down. "That is the fault of Ranta, too."

The Flint Chipper scraped about, found a few morsels of hedgehog and sat down beside his friend. It was dusk, the fire lively and a vast comfort, the night a hideous thing which it was better not to look at. Awal was gloomy again. He ate in silence, and afterward he lay down near Juk, wanting to sleep.

"When day comes," he said all at once, "I shall take it back."

"Take what back?" asked Juk.

"The dog. It is no longer Ranta's; it is mine. Will you help me?"

"Yes," said Juk smilingly.

That was all that was said, but it was enough. They went to sleep thinking of the dog they must get back, and when, shortly before sunrise, they wakened from the broken and uneasy slumber which was so typical of their hazardous lives, the dog was still foremost in their minds. Saying nothing to the others of the tribe, Juk and Awal went down to drink at the stream, and there made their plans.

"We must go at once," said Awal. "If we delay, Goort will guess what we mean to do, and block us."

"Or Karakaa will make us go hunting," added Juk. "You are right. The time to go is now."

They rose from the stream and began to wander in the woods, as people do when they are hungry and want

to ease the gnawing ache inside them. Many of the bushes and vines were losing their blossoms, and small hard green nodules of fruit were forming. The boys picked some of these immature berries, chewing them down despite the sharp bitter taste of them. Taste did not matter. In stone-age Britain you were lucky to keep alive; feasts of good red meat were less common than days and days of munching roots and green berries and even leaves and the bark of trees, together with a few bird's eggs stumbled upon by chance, or perhaps some four-foot the size of your fist. Picking and munching berries, the boys wandered out of sight of the camp, and then turned and struck off in the direction of the valley.

"Now we shall see what we shall see," muttered Awal.

"Do you think the dog went back to Ranta?" asked the Flint Chipper.

"Yes; I feel it did."

Juk was thoughtful. "I feel queerly since the dog fled from us," he said presently.

"I also," said his friend, and he added: "*How* do you feel?"

"Queer inside," said Juk. "That is all I can say—a queer feeling inside."

"It is enough," declared Awal. "I know how it is. At first the dog was nothing at all, and I only wanted to take it for the sake of plaguing Ranta. Yet no sooner

were we back at the camp with it than the creature seemed to worm its way into me. I think its eyes did it."

"The dog had fine eyes," admitted the Flint Chipper. "They blazed like fire when you came near, but afterward they shone softly, like the glow which stands in the sky just after sunset. It was the eyes which made me start talking to the creature."

Awal smiled a little. "It will be pleasant to have the dog back. I could enjoy talking to it, also fighting and rolling around with it. I would not care if it bit me. These bites on my forearms, they are nothing more than thorn scratches."

"It will be harder to steal this dog this time," said Juk.

"We shall get it," Awal answered. "I shall not give up until I have it."

Now that was mouth-filling talk, as the Hunting People were accustomed to say, for Ranta was certain to be on his guard against a second attack. The boys crept down to the edge of the valley and paused to reconnoiter. They saw the horses once more at this end of the pond, and well guarded. Several men stood watch over them, Ranta and his dog not far from the others.

"Ho, the dog did go back!" exclaimed Awal.

"The Beast Herders are too many down there," Juk

said. "We put them on guard when we stole the dog, and now there are men to help Ranta. You say you will not give up until you get the dog, Awal; but how is it to be done? Nobody robs an eagle's nest with the old birds hovering near, claws out and ready!"

Awal did not know how to do it. There was an impetuous anger raging in him, but although he was brave and reckless, the boy had enough sense to realize the folly of attacking now. They could not hope to get the dog until it was alone with Ranta.

"Pah!" he said, and rubbed his teeth together in disgust.

"It may be that if we wait here the men will sink down and die," said Juk.

"How that?"

"From Goort's magic. Have you forgotten that he made images of the Beast Herders, and pierced those images? They will soon feel the thrust of daggers and knives, and when they fall down in pain, we can rush up and take the dog!"

"H'm," said Awal, and after a moment's thought rejected this plan. "That would be sitting down beside green berries and waiting for them to grow red and ripe. Goort knows how to make magic, but it often takes much time for it to work. I remember the time that we could find no game, and he did a charm to make

four-foots appear in the woods; it was many days and much hunger before we chanced upon the wild boar that we finally killed and ate. From the look of those herders down there it will be a long time until Goort's image-piercing destroys them."

Juk thought so too. The boys continued to watch their enemies, trying to avoid sight of the dog, because it irked them to see the creature with Ranta. Then the Flint Chipper was aware of a clever idea in his head. How it got there he could never have explained.

"Hearken to me," he said swiftly. "A dog is a dog, and a small one is better than a big one, because the young of all animals are fatter and more comical than after they have grown up. Do you understand me, Awal? I mean that we can do more wisely than try for this dog of Ranta's; we can go dig out a cub of our own, perhaps one for each of us!"

"Dig out?" asked the wondering Awal. "Young dogs?"

"Young wolves, which is nearly the same thing. The ridge to the west sometimes has a wolf den in its rocks. Come along!"

Awal nodded and stood up. He made a grimace in Ranta's direction, jeeringly softly:

"Keep your worthless four-foot! We shall have better ones of our own!"

The boys drew back and started for the ridge which bordered the valley on the west. They were in high spirits, for if they could find a wolf den there would likely be cubs in it. This was the season for them, and if the old wolves attacked while the boys were digging, Juk could stand them off with his spear while Awal got the cubs.

"Trees less and less thick," said Juk as they crossed a last ravine and saw the ridge loom up ahead. "Open country, with plenty of sun, that is where wolves dig their dens. Ah!"

"What is it?" demanded Awal.

Juk pointed. In a rocky crevice just ahead of them there was a multitude of tiny black objects, hurtling to and fro and together sending up a chorus of sound.

"Wild bees," said Juk. "What shall we do?"

"Go on," replied Awal.

On they went, for the first time in their lives abandoning so valuable a find as a colony of wild bees. At any other time the boys would have been excited and happy, because of the honey which they could get by robbing the bees' nest, but today their minds were fixed upon wolf cubs, and not even the delicious taste of wild honey could turn them aside. The bees could wait.

"If we get three cubs," said Awal, striding along a heather-lined path, "what shall we do then?"

"Nobody could answer such a question as that!" chuckled the other. "We are two, so the cubs must be two!"

"Maybe there will be only one," said Awal, all at once pessimistic.

"If there is only one it is mine."

Awal was ahead in the path, and at this he whirled around to scowl at Juk.

"No," said Awal, "it will be mine."

"It will be mine," insisted the Flint Chipper. "The dog we took from Ranta was yours, the first wolf cub we get is mine. I want a pet as much as you do. But probably there will be two, so that you can have one, too."

The scowl went away from Awal's face. He was good-humored again, and was about to start on when Juk seized him and jerked him to the ground. Awal filled with rage. It appeared to him that Juk was wanting to give him a beating for wanting a wolf cub, in case there was only one; and accordingly Awal began to kick and strike at his friend, doing his best to get on his feet so that he could fight to better advantage.

"Lie still, you squirming snake!" whispered Juk, and held him fast. "A wolf is passing. It will show us where the den is, if you will be quiet."

That was different, and immediately Awal straightened out on the ground, silent beside the Flint Chipper.

The slope was covered with grass and low scrub, and occasionally a clump of heather. Juk lifted up to peer, and after a look he motioned for Awal to have a look. Far up the slope toward the ridge there was a faint gray blotch, moving stealthily to the south and southeast; at times it went out of sight, but always it reappeared, pursuing its zigzag course down toward the valley.

"A wolf," murmured Juk; "and from the way it acts it is just leaving its den. See it now! It is heading back over the ridge to the west. As sure as there are eyes in my head the creature means to circle around and end up in this valley of ours, where the horse herd grazes. The direction the wolf takes now is no more than trickery, to hide the location of the den."

"There are people who know more than you," said Awal, by way of praise, "but also those who know less. Come on."

They rose and made their way up the slope, searching, not for the den itself, but for the wolf's trail. In perhaps the time that it takes the sun's shadow to move across a brook of water they had found the faint, elusive trail and were crawling back upon it, sniffing at the scent like wild animals and watching the ground for the slightest footmark. The trail twisted and curved and led up toward the ridge, but Awal did not like that.

"Beyond that ridge is another valley," he reminded

Juk, "and in that valley live the fierce wild people that we call the Yellers. They are ugly and short and we despise them, nevertheless they fight hard. I have no wish to dig out wolf cubs on a slope where the Yellers might see us."

"Wise words," said Juk. "Let us sit down and listen, and it may be that we will hear the wolf cubs yapping and barking, the way they do. If we hear that, we can know where the den lies, and then do what we should."

The boys sat down against a hot rock, idly watching a colored butterfly, and enjoying the scent of the pungent shrubs surrounding them on all sides. They listened.

"I hear something," said Awal, after a long while, "but it is a hunter; a man and not a wolf. There is trouble; I feel it in my head."

Up they sprang, gazing intently in the direction of the sound. Voices fell upon their ears, and soon they saw men hurrying up the slope from a point to the south.

"Beast Herders," murmured Juk. "What are they chasing?"

"A wolf," said Awal with conviction. "Perhaps the one we saw, perhaps its mate; but no matter, they are on the trail. It must be that the four-foot tried to kill a colt, and the herders intend to slay the wolf as a block against such attacks in days to come."

"We must be careful," said Juk.

There was no particular danger that the Beast Herders would see Juk and Awal, at least not yet. The hunters had scattered out and were combing the hillside for the wolf. They were shouting angrily, intent upon the creature that had attacked their precious horses, and never so much as glancing toward the boys.

"Are they venturing beyond the ridge?" said Awal. "That noise they make will be bad. The Yellers have sharp ears."

The hunters kept on, apparently unaware that the next valley was inhabited. One or two of the hunters passed out of sight, beyond the ridge and into the territory of the Yellers. A pre-historic boundary line had been crossed, a frontier had been violated, and if the Yellers discovered it there was going to be trouble, just as Awal had divined.

The trouble put in appearance sooner than the boys had expected. A large party of Yellers had evidently been hunting on the eastern border of their territory, and the Beast Herders had run into them. Suddenly Juk and Awal caught sight of the intruders who had so unwittingly ventured beyond the ridge: they were running back, shouting a warning to their companions. The Yellers appeared, screaming with all their might, according to their custom when they were on the warpath. They greatly outnumbered the wolf hunters from

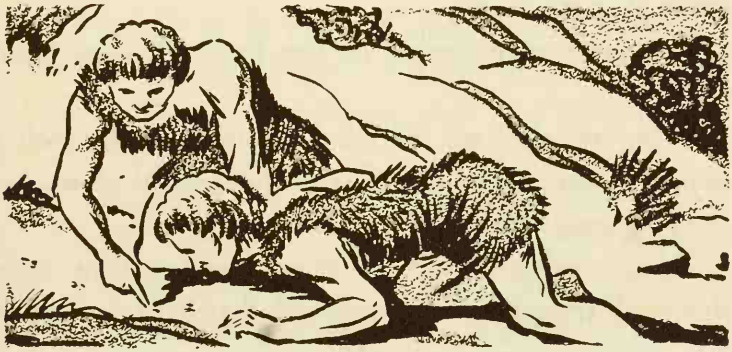
the valley, and as a consequence the Beast Herders fled down the slope, putting out of mind the four-footed marauder they had intended to slay.

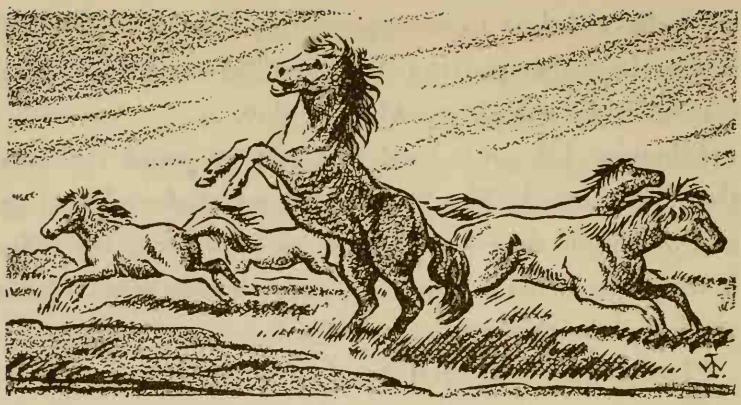
Likewise Juk and Awal put out of mind the cubs they had wanted. The Yellers were uncomfortably close, and although they would soon go back over the ridge it would be many a long day before it was safe to hunt wolf dens in this particular hillside.

"Let us go," muttered Awal.

"Yes," agreed his friend. "The Yellers will watch the slope for a long time, and when they stop watching, the cubs will be big and out of their dens, able to fend for themselves."

Weary and disappointed, the boys turned back toward camp. They did not know that today's experience was to point the way to an adventure far more exciting and dangerous than the looting of a wolf den. . . .





CHAPTER XI

The Yellers Must Help

"HAVE you brought back no game to eat?" demanded Talker, as the boys came trailing into camp that afternoon.

"We have been spying on the Beast Herders," said Juk.

"Yes, and they are still alive," put in Awal, with a scowl. "The magic that Goort did against them has done no good at all."

"Magic needs time, and boys need to stop their mouths," retorted the wizard. "I destroyed images of

the Beast Herders, and the men themselves will perish. Only wait, and all of you shall see."

Karakaa kept still. He was not the wisest of men, but he was fairly reasonable, and his sense told him that the magic very likely required time to work.

Next morning he led his hunters off to the east, seeking game and saying nothing of Beast Herders. At a stream they found deer signs and set out to find the creatures themselves. The sky was overcast, mist forming in low hollow places, and the threat of rain growing and growing. For most of the day they searched for deer, and at last gave up in despair; there was no use hunting any farther for a trail which had long ago disappeared.

"Some of those footprints were big," declared Nashad, turning homeward. "It would have been a big deer."

"I remember a deer that we once killed," said Talker. "We lay in ambush for it, spearing the thing as it climbed up out of the water, dripping from a fording of a stream. Many spears pierced it, the blood of the deer reddening the water for farther than your eye could see. The meat was good."

"Perhaps we can eat your memory of that deer," said Big Foot, in a sarcastic tone. "Tell me more, Talker, so that I can take a mouthful and begin chewing."

Everyone save Talker laughed at that, yet they were

quickly sober again. Food, food, they must have food for their teeth! Yesterday there was meat, but yesterday was gone, and this was today with new aches and cramps for empty stomachs. They scattered to comb the woods on the way back to camp, Juk and Awal munching the leaves of certain bushes as a means of stilling hunger, Big Foot raging because there was no game, Karakaa painstakingly knocking over a small quail. The mist turned into rain, and by the time they got home they were wet and cross.

"No meat?" cried the women.

"Do you see meat?" retorted Karakaa. "There is only this quail, and it is for me. Let the rest of you get something, green berries or whatever else there is."

Talker sighed and squatted down by the smoking fire. "It is because of the Beast Herders," he said. "They have been roaming in the woods and frightening our game."

"When will these intruders be dead?" asked Karakaa, suddenly turning to the wizard.

"Before the sun shines again," replied Goort, after a little hesitation.

"Ho!" exploded Big Foot. "I have seen the sun stop shining for longer than it takes wild-plum blossoms to give way to fruit the size of your thumb-end! We must get rid of our enemies before that."

"Perhaps they are dead already," said Goort haughtily.

"I shall send a spy to see about that," grumbled Karakaa. "A spy, and at once."

The chief named Claw Face, and that one slipped off toward the head of the valley. The others of the tribe sat hunched over in the rain, the smoke of the fire stinging their eyes, and the damp dismal weather pressing them deep into gloom. Just before dusk Claw Face returned, and his face told them, before his tongue did, that the Beast Herders were as before—alive, not dead.

"Something must be done!" cried Karakaa. "I was patient, but now I am patient no more. Goort, what is wrong?"

"My magic was good," replied the wizard, "but it has not been able to do its work."

Juk leaned over to Awal to whisper: "The child that picked up an image while Goort was away, perhaps that was the interference."

"Perhaps," said Awal, "but Goort does not know of that. He will explain it in another way. Listen!"

"I am a great wizard," Goort was saying, in a harsh voice. "I make good magic, and when it does not work it is not my fault."

"Whose fault is it, then?" asked Karakaa.

"The fault of the Beast Herders," was the reply; "especially the magic-makers among them. All people have wizards. These strangers have one. They brought

him with them from the other end of the world, just as they brought horses. I do magic against the Beast Herders, the wizard of the Beast Herders does magic to wipe out what I do, and thus we are like two stags who put their horned heads together and push, one blocking the other."

Karakaa signed for a woman to fetch more wood for the fire. She threw on a wet chunk and a cloud of acrid smoke welled up. The chief drew back a little, coughing irritably.

"I was patient," he said again, "but now I will not be patient any more, until we are rid of our enemies. We cannot move to other hunting grounds. To the east there is no game, to the north there are too many troublesome bears and similar beasts. In the south the country is too open to attack, west beyond the ridges there are Yellers. So we must stay here."

Juk lifted up, his face quickening.

"The Yellers," he murmured. "It may be that they are the answer."

"What are you saying?" demanded Awal.

"Hearken to me, Karakaa," said the Flint Chipper loudly. "I have in me something unfolding, and I think it is a plan to get rid of the Beast Herders. Will you listen?"

"I will listen to a blind crow if it can help me," retorted the chief. "Speak."

All eyes turned upon Juk, and Juk told them of the search for a wolf den, how Awal and he had prowled on the slope near the edge of the valley where the Yellers dwelt, and how certain Beast Herders came running back this way, a pack of angry Yellers behind them.

"The Yellers must help," said Juk, with shining eyes. "We must get them to fight the Beast Herders. Now my idea is this. If we—"

A wave of bitter laughter went around the circle of men. The thing that Juk had said was utterly ridiculous. Later on, in the centuries to come, it was to be a common thing for groups of people to unite for purposes of fighting other groups, but the age of military alliances had not yet dawned. No matter how much the Yellers might hate the Beast Herders, it would be easier to lead a wild bull by the ears than to persuade the Yellers to come fight the strangers by the pond.

"Will *you* go to the Yellers and ask them to slay the Beast Herders?" the chief scowled at Juk. "Perhaps you will take a piece of chipped flint as a gift to them!"

"And come back with the flint stuck into your skull," said Nashad. "Why is it that boys have so little sense? Is it because they are young, or because we treat them like men and thus turn their wits!"

Juk was angry, but lest he say too much and be knocked flat for impudence, Awal silenced his friend.

"You others did not wait for Juk to finish," he said. "I do not know his plan, but I know it is reasonable, because he himself is that way."

"In chipping flint, yes," said Talker; "in other things, no."

"If you wish to get rid of the Beast Herders," said Juk stormily, "you will listen to me. The Yellers must help, but I do not mean they must know it. We can use them without their seeing what we do. Consider this: the Yellers are warlike; they are a brutish ugly people who seem to us half-mad and more violent than is natural; we keep out of their valley as we avoid nests of hornets; but what if the Beast Herders go over the ridge and attack the Yellers?"

Karakaa swallowed hard. "There would then be war," he said gravely, "yet how are you to get the Beast Herders to attack?"

"Horses," said Juk, smiling with triumph.

"You speak riddles," grumbled the wizard.

"It is no riddle," Juk assured him. "The horses are the greatest of all the possessions of the Beast Herders. They would fight to keep them, fight to get them back. Good; what we must do is to take the herd unawares and drive it over the ridge into the valley where the Yellers live, then when the Beast Herders come to get the creatures back they will run into clubs and spears. There is

a low place in the ridge farther to the south. We could run the horses there, with someone stationed near the low place to turn them up the slope. Reindeer can be driven, horses can be driven."

Juk paused, and a silence fell. Even Talker was quiet. Talker, and the scoffing wizard who hated so to have anyone else advise Karakaa as to what must be done. The men had been impressed by Juk's plan, there was no denying that. It was not perfect, of course; and there were many points to be settled, but the nub of it was sound, and that was the main thing. Slowly and with serious faces they began to discuss the matter, arguing, making suggestions and rejecting them, until the night was far spent and everyone heavy with sleep.

"In the morning, then," said Karakaa, lying down at last. "Juk has spoken well. We shall do it."

The Flint Chipper was content. He stretched out beside Awal, lying close against him for the sake of the warmth of his body, and Awal was glad to have him. It was a damp, bone-aching night, and the fire gave out more smoke than heat.

They slept and rose up in the cool misty dawn, stiff in the joints, but eager to try the new offensive against their enemies. Karakaa gave orders. The women and children were to break camp, trailing off to Two-hole Cave to wait for the men to come for them. That was

to keep them out of the way, in case the Beast Herders wandered too far this way. As for the men, they were to separate into three groups. Talker and a companion were to lurk in the woods to the north of the valley, howling in imitation of wolves. Nashad and the wizard were to go down the valley to a point south of the low place in the ridge, ready to turn the horses west up the slope toward the valley of the Yellers. All the rest of the men, including Juk and Awal, were to hide near the head of the valley, so as to rush upon the horses and stampede them as soon as the Beast Herders had passed north into the hills to hunt the "wolves."

"Use wit, all of you," concluded the chief. "This is a net against our enemies, and if any of us fail then the net is broken and there is no catch. Come."

They filed out of camp, went south a little way, and halted. Talker and his fellow "wolf" headed for their station, Nashad and the wizard slipped off toward the valley, Karakaa and the bulk of his men trailed off to the very ravine where Juk and Awal had once hidden to watch the Beast Herders pass in search of neighing "horses."

Quietly they settled down to wait, the boys whispering in undertones. Juk was doubtful. He could not forget that first attempt to ambush their enemies; the Beast Herders had responded to the lure of the false

horses, but finding no tracks they had become suspicious and slipped out of the ambush which the Hunting People had prepared for them. It seemed to the young flint chipper that this proved the present attempt would fail.

Was that a strange way to reason? To us, yes; to the people of Juk's time, no. Primitive man was so overwhelmingly ignorant of so many things that in his groping effort to bring order out of chaos, and knowledge out of vagueness, he leaned heavily upon his own experience. If he fell sick the first time he ate fish with red spots near the gills, he was likely to conclude that all fish with red spots near the gills were poisonous. If he cursed the evil spirit of a cave and presently broke a leg or an arm, he concluded that evil spirits had better be treated with respect. The modern world is still tinged with this type of reasoning, because under it there is hidden such possibilities of truth and fact that it is hard to know what is common sense and what is mere superstition.

"If we had gone to another ravine," he said to Awal, "I think it would have been better. We tried this place before, and failed."

"It was different then," murmured Awal. "Wolves are beasts that could destroy the horde herd, so our enemies will come. As soon as Talker starts in—"

"Are *you* Talker?" frowned the chief, turning to Awal. "Tell your teeth to bite your tongue, so that it will be still."

Big Foot made a sign. The howling of the wolves was beginning. Loud and insistent the noise flowed down the ravine. It was a kind of boast that soon there would be horse meat to eat, and after a certain time had passed there were barks from the valley.

"That is my dog," whispered Awal; "the one Ranta has now. Maybe Ranta is coming with the dog and the rest of the men."

It turned out that way. After a long wait the Beast Herders appeared, not in the ravine below the ambushed Hunting People, but on the opposite slope. The strangers crept in silence, some with spears, most of them with bow and arrow; and from their manner they were hunting wolves. Ranta was among them, the dog at his heels and growling softly each time that a "wolf" howled in the woods ahead.

"All the Beast Herders are there," smiled Karakaa. "They have left the horses in charge of the women. It will be easy, the thing we have to do."

Quickly the Beast Herders were out of sight, then Karakaa gestured for his men to rise. The false howls would lead the strangers on and on, and though in the end they would discover the trick, it would then be too

late. The stampeding of the horse herd was a thing which Karakaa meant to take at a swift pace.

"Follow me," he said. "If women stand in our way, brush them away like gnats, but no more. Women are not worth pausing to slay; we must attend to the horses."

"I am glad the dog is gone," said Awal, as they started down the ravine. "He might bark at us and get himself killed with a spear."

"And Ranta likewise," observed Juk.

"Ho, that might be a good thing, the rascal!"

They stopped talking. The valley was near at hand, and voices might carry down to the camp of the strangers. The horses were grazing at the upper end of the pond, but there appeared to be no one watching them. So far as the Hunting People could see, all the women and even the children were busy with the pit-houses, lashing down the hides which were to form the outer layer of roof.

"Spirits are bad," muttered Karakaa, "yet sometimes I believe there are also good spirits. This is such a time. The horses are alone, for us to do with as we like. Now let everyone slip forward as quietly as possible, but when the creatures snort and take alarm we must rush them. Spread out."

It was done. The hunters advanced in a wide-flung

line, as people do when they are beating tall grass or thickets for game. Juk walked with Awal on his left hand and Claw Face on his right, his spear lightly at his side. Seemingly there was to be no work for spears, then the horses saw them and jerked up their heads, bits of forgotten grass in their mouths, and ears slanting forward. The creatures were uneasy.

All of a sudden Karakaa and his men saw that the horses were not alone. There was a herder, a man who had been lying on the ground, napping perhaps. Yes, but he was not napping now; he was springing to his feet, bow in hand.

"Rush the herd!" cried Karakaa. "And the herder, slay him if he does not flee!"

The attacking party ran forward, shouting and brandishing their spears. In alarm the horses wheeled to run, the herder trying in vain to halt them. He got in the way of the lead mare and was knocked down, then Big Foot threw his spear and the herder gave up the struggle. There was a mortal wound in him; Big Foot finished him and got back his spear, shouting in triumph because he had killed one of the strangers.

"Pay attention to the horses!" cried Karakaa. "There is trouble in them. They do not want to flee!"

That was not quite true, though it seemed so. The horses were alarmed and had started to run, but they

THE ATTACKING PARTY RAN FORWARD SHOUTING AND BRANDISHING THEIR SPEARS.

were depending upon their leader to show the way, and the lead mare could not. She was hobbled, and each time that she tried to bound off she was checked by the thongs around her forefeet. Wildly she floundered down the western shore of the pond, the herd milling about her in confusion. Karakaa was desperate. The women and children at the camp had seen what was happening and were screaming for their men to come drive away the ones who were stealing their horses. It looked as though Juk's plan had struck a serious snag; then Awal cried out:

"Finish the old mare and the rest of the horses will run! That is how to do it!"

Claw Face nodded and rushed forward. He was a man who said very little, but he could do things. Scattering the horses as a snapping twig might scatter a covey of young pheasants, Claw Face got to the side of the lead mare. A moment to aim and he had given her a death blow; she sank down, and the herd fled away, the Hunting People behind the colt that brought up the rear.

"Now we have them!" shouted Awal, racing over the hummocky ground. "South they go!"

"South, but not together!" said Juk. "They miss their leader; they are going to break up on us, no longer a herd!"

"Look out!" Karakaa was calling. "Watch them against the slope, do not let them get off into the center of the valley. They are past the pond now, and there is room for them to spread."

The Hunting People were having their troubles. They had chased horses before, but always in narrow ravines or small meadows or in uplands where boulders made it hard for the creatures to flee. This was different. A wide valley lay before the horses. There was nothing to hinder their flight, and having lost their leader they ran blindly, fanning out as fingers fan out from the palm of a hand. Swift-footed and stubborn the Hunting People kept after them, doing their best to force them toward the slope bordering the valley on the west, but scarcely succeeding. The horses did not want to go that way.

"I see Nashad and the wizard," panted Juk. "Surely they will turn them."

Nashad and Goort stood waving their spears and shouting. Closer and closer pounded the horses, then at the sight of the two men ahead they hesitated. Snorting loudly they turned aside, some of them galloping up the slope to the west, others running on down the valley. Karakaa made violent gestures to Nashad and the wizard.

"Chase the ones that have gone up the slope! They will pass over the low place into the next valley. We others will try to get more to follow," he yelled.

Juk darted off to the left, Awal close behind him. They had seen a mare and a colt go off in the direction of a thicket, and they meant to head them off and drive them toward the valley of the Yellers. Nashad and Goort were trotting up the slope to the west, horses ahead of them. The rest of the hunters were trying to head off the beasts that had fled on down the valley. The boys lost track of their companions; the mare and colt had got into the thicket and were crashing about in the effort to escape.

"We must get round to the other side," said Awal excitedly. "If the mare gets there before we do she will outwit us."

"And the colt?" laughed Juk. "Will the colt also outwit us?"

"The colt is of no use," was the retort; "the mare is the one that counts."

They circled the thicket. It was a tangle of elders and young hawthorn trees and scrub birches, with other things that the boys neither recognized nor cared about. Stealthily they listened, and heard nothing. Could it be that the mare and colt had got through? There was no sign of them in the valley, but then there were other thickets and the fugitives might have escaped to the shelter of one of these. Juk and Awal began to look for tracks, persisting until they heard Karakaa calling.

"We are here!" Awal shouted back.

At that the thicket abandoned its silence. Bushes crashed, vines tightened and snapped, the noise of floundering animals fell upon the air. Suddenly there was a shout from the other side of the brush patch, a shout followed by laughter. The boys ran to see what happened, and found Karakaa and the rest of the men standing about a colt. The chief had killed it, and the wild-eyed mare had fled on down the valley.

"The colt sprang onto my spear!" chuckled Karakaa. "Juk, you and Awal did well to chase it my way. You must do it again."

"What does it matter that you killed it, and that Juk and I did not!" retorted Awal, with a shrug of annoyance. "It will taste the same."

"It is a young colt and it will taste better than deer meat," declared Big Foot. "We must take it with us, but which way? Horses have been chased over into the valley of the Yellers, so we had best keep away from the western slope. And we cannot go back the way we came, because the Beast Herders will soon be coming to see what has happened. The only way is to cross the valley and go up the eastern slope."

Goort pursed his lips, hinting that the eastern slope might be infested with evil spirits, but when he saw that the others meant to go he gave his consent.

"Yes, let us go that way," he said. "We can work back to the neighborhood of our camp, and without the danger of being seen by enemies."

Karakaa picked up the colt by the feet, slinging it onto his shoulders and trudging off with it. He led the way across the valley, keeping behind a screen of brush as much as possible. The horses had scattered, and although in time the Beast Herders would have to venture into the valley of the Yellers after the ones that Nashad and the wizard had chased there, this lower valley would also be explored. The Hunting People must take pains not to be seen, either now or later on their way north and home.

"You were clever not to claim the colt," Juk said to Awal, marching along behind the men.

"Was I?" said Awal. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that Karakaa thought to make us say we had first claim on the colt, then he would have made us carry it, with no more to eat at the end!"

Awal grinned. "Without knowing it," he said, "I did well. I can see that the colt is heavy. Look, he is shifting it, as people do with too great a burden."

The colt seemed to grow heavier and heavier. Karakaa no longer talked of the bold thing they had done against the Beast Herders, but trudged along with bent shoulders. By the time the Hunting People had got across

the valley the chief was weary, and when they started up the wooded slope in a northeasterly direction he growled openly.

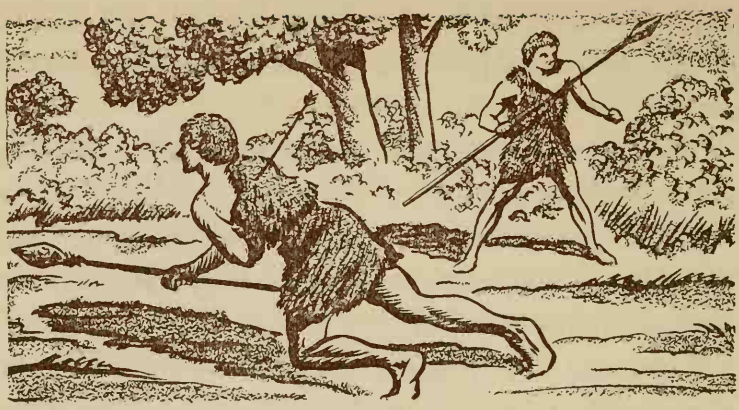
"The place to carry meat," he declared, "is inside you, not on your back."

"It jumped onto your spear!" Awal reminded him. "H'm, but it will taste good. It is a long time since we ate horse meat."

"Very soon I am halting," said Karakaa. "We might as well cook it hereabouts as anywhere else. The trees will hide the smoke of a fire; and besides, any roving Beast Herder will look the other way, not east and north."

No one spoke. The others were keeping silent on purpose, for it was risky to build fire when enemies were prowling about, and if trouble came of stopping to eat the colt it would be Karakaa's fault.

"I have said it," said the chief, a little farther on: "I have said it, and now I do it. We are going to eat the colt, and what we do not eat we can carry more easily than now. Beyond that upjutting rock ahead we shall stop."



CHAPTER XII

Unfinished Feast

THEY halted behind a ledge of rock that was higher off the ground than the height of a man and his spear held aloft. Here they built a fire, Nashad gathering wood while Karakaa and Big Foot dressed the colt and hacked it apart with their rude stone tools.

"Our smoke goes up," observed Juk, glancing at the sky. "It will be a sign, if anyone sees it."

"We need a sentinel to watch against that," replied the chief; "and you are that sentinel, Juk!"

There was a laugh from the men, but the Flint Chip-

per took it quietly. He asked Awal to save him a share of the horse meat, and then he clambered up onto the ledge and hunted out a spot where he could see down into the valley to the west. Juk sat down to watch, stone dagger and hatchet in his belt, spear in his right hand.

It was a fine day. Unnoticed by the Hunting People, the rain had stopped; and now, with the strengthening sun, the mist was gone and the sky was blue and fresh. To the north were still a few clouds, but a south wind was blowing and the clouds were retreating, like so many wild beasts that have ventured out of their lairs only to be forced back. Blue sky and a few clouds, clear air that held a tang of heather and fir trees and a multitude of small flowering things—it was the kind of day that Juk should have enjoyed to the utmost. The landscape was a motley carpet of many shades of green, spots of white and yellow and blue where flowers blossomed, and an occasional slash of reddish color that the Flint Chipper could not identify. There were birds cheeping, butterflies floating lazily, squirrels chattering gaily. Spring was turning into summer, serene and lovely.

Truly it was the kind of day that ought to have put Juk into an odorous and enchanting daydream, and it did not. For he would not allow himself to be drugged by it. He could not afford to dream, not today, not

when there were enemies ranging in the valley stretched out at his feet. Behind there was the telltale smoke of Karakaa's fire; in front of him there were people who would snarl in triumph to see that smoke. Perhaps they would not see it, because it was far away, and thin by the time it rose above the ridge; but perhaps the Beast Herders *would* see it. They were looking for horses, and some of these horses had fled south and southeast, so that it was possible that Ranta's people would glance up here to the east.

If they did, they might think the fire a thing built by people in a neighboring valley, and then again they might not. Their women had by this time told them how the herd had been run off, and accordingly they would be looking for the ones who had done such a thing. And when you are looking for enemies you do not expect to find them dangling in front of your face, like so many flies in a spider's web; enemies try to hide, so you must spy them out, smell them, track them to where they think they are safe.

"I see, and I do not like," murmured Juk, all at once.

He had caught sight of men far down in the valley. They were Beast Herders, and from the way they dashed about they were rounding up their scattered horses. It seemed to Juk that they were near the thicket where Karakaa had slain the colt.

"Go away," he muttered. "May demons tempt you to look in other directions, not here."

Suddenly a small something fell at his feet, rolling over and over in the dirt. Juk picked it up. It was a chunk of horse meat, warm and soft. He jerked around and saw Awal, laughing at him from behind a tree.

"Is this all I get?" demanded Juk.

"The colt was small," chuckled Awal, coming forward.

"And the mouths of you eaters big!" retorted the Flint Chipper. "Is everyone eating?"

"No," said Awal, and sat down. "It is not half done. Only the outside is fit for teeth, but soon it is ready. This piece Karakaa sent you to keep you awake."

Juk brushed the meat free of dirt and took a bite, a wrenching, jerking bite such as he was accustomed to do with meat. That was because meat was generally tough, but this was not. The colt was young, milk-fed, and consequently tender. It was sweet and juicy, and Juk thought it better than wild cattle or deer. Awal had a piece for himself, and when he, too, had a full mouth they compared notes.

"Good," Juk managed to say.

"Horses are something we should have," said Awal, between gulps. "Then we should not have to go hunting every time the inside of us aches and growls."

"It is too hard to catch horses," Juk objected.

"They are already caught."

"What do you mean?"

"The horses of the strangers down there," said Awal, gesturing toward the valley. "We have only to slay the herders and the four-foots are ours."

"Yes," jeered the Flint Chipper; "all we have to do when we want a necklace of bear's claws is to seize a bear and pull the claws out of his feet!"

"Bears can be killed, and so can strangers," returned Awal, wiping his mouth with his forearm. "We killed a Beast Herder today."

"The others will be harder to slay," said Juk. "After what we did today they will be on guard."

"Their horses are scattered. We could round them up and drive them off to where the strangers could never follow."

"The horses are being collected even while we talk," said Juk, and he pointed to the valley.

Awal looked, a hand shading his eyes. There were horses far off to the right, in the direction of the pond. The creatures appeared to be moving; probably men were driving them, although the men themselves could not be seen from this distance.

"Nevertheless we should get ourselves horses," said Awal, "then we could eat meat every day, and not just

when we chance to kill game, as we do now. Karakaa says so."

Juk laughed. "Ho, so that is where you got the idea! It grew in another skull and you brought it here as your own, as a stag carries burrs in his hair!"

"You poke fun," said Awal, in a nettled tone; "but when we get our horse herd you will eat with the rest of us."

"First I would like to eat with the rest of you *today*," retorted Juk. "Go bring me more meat. I can smell it. The stuff is done enough to eat, and I am hungry."

Awal rose. His eyes wandered across the valley toward the ridge which bounded the territory of the Yellers.

"Have you seen signs of fighting over there?" he asked.

"Who can see that far?" demanded Juk. "I am no eagle. Will you get me meat?"

"I am hungry, and I may forget," said Awal teasingly. "You know how it is: a starving man cannot see beyond his teeth!"

Juk snatched up a handful of small stones and began to pelt him, and Awal fled back toward the fire, laughing loudly. Would he bring meat for the Flint Chipper? There was no telling. He might, or he might not. Awal was a lover of jokes, and it was possible that he would bring his friend a bone that only a wolf could chew, or

perhaps slip up and knock Juk flat with a huge chunk of hot meat. You could never tell about Awal.

"I will listen for him," thought Juk, "but I will not appear to want meat badly, lest that give him more pleasure."

There was no sound from the fire. No doubt everyone was intent upon eating, Awal full-mouthed and indifferent to the hungry Flint Chipper. Gradually, Juk gave up hope. He looked out upon the valley, relieved to see no trace of the Beast Herders. The world was quiet, and for the moment it was peaceful.

Ah, but that was suspicious! Life was full of danger back there in stone-age Britain, and because of this hard fact men had got into the way of distrusting things which appeared serene and kindly. Juk's nostrils expanded, his ears twitched a little. He resembled, just then, a wild animal which has no definite reason for expecting trouble, and yet is little by little filling with alarm. There was not a sound, and yet the Flint Chipper's skin was crawling. Something was lurking near, perhaps a wild beast, perhaps two-footed enemies. The boy tensed, his right hand stealthily gripping his spear, his leg muscles preparing for a spring.

"It is not Awal," he told himself. "Awal is of my own people; his nearness could not make me feel like this."

He rose to his feet, taking pains to act casual and at

ease, in case there were spies watching him from some leafy covert. Slowly he wandered back toward the fire, eyes rolling from side to side, and ears alert to catch the slightest sound. At the ledge he looked around, saw nothing, and clambered down to the fire. Karakaa and his men were squatting in a circle, tearing at horse meat with their teeth. The chief glanced up.

"What are you wanting here?" he demanded.

"I feel enemies near," said Juk.

That was enough. Juk did not need to say that he had seen them, or heard them; if he *felt* them to be near it was a good reason for moving to another and a safer place. Karakaa gestured toward the colt: his men began to hack off what they wanted, the rest of it to be left behind. Then Talker said:

"We should work the fire trick and thus cover our deed with the colt."

"Yes," said Karakaa.

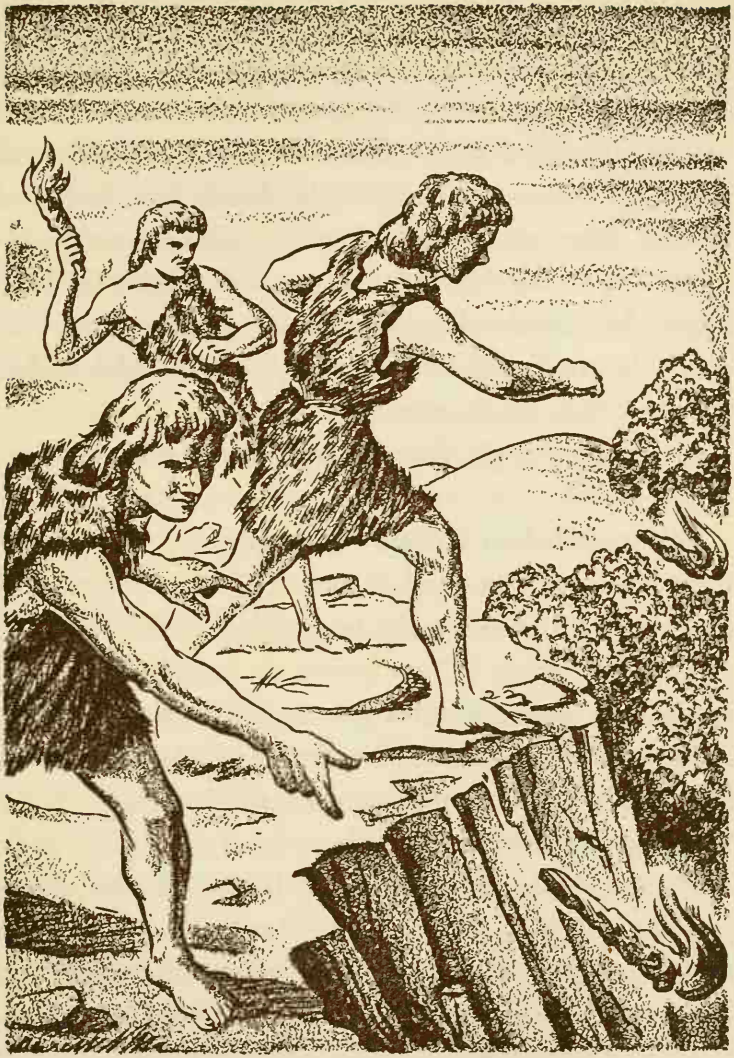
Juk crammed a piece of horse meat into his pouch and picked up a firebrand. Each man had taken a blazing stick, and now everyone was clambering up to the top of the ledge. There they halted, took aim, and threw the firebrands into the brush. In little time there was fire spreading out from the spots where the brands had fallen, fire that built a screen of flame and smoke between the ledge and the valley from which the Beast

Herders were probably coming. If the Hunting People had acted soon enough the fire would hide all signs of the half-devoured colt, as well as the trail of the fleeing ones. The smoke thickened, moving up and off in a northerly direction, because of the wind from the south. Speaking to his men only by signs, Karakaa led them up the ridge, their course parallel with the drifting smoke.

It was a bit of prehistoric strategy, a paleolithic smoke screen which the Hunting People had used many times before, and with good effect. Enemies spied out your fire, and when you suspected they were near at hand you spread flames and smoke, and retreated. In most cases your enemies were afraid to venture any closer, and while they hesitated you were able to escape.

Thus it was in most cases, but this time things were to work out a little differently. Juk was right in suspecting the approach of the Beast Herders. They had found the trail of the mare and colt, then the trail of Karakaa's men. Unseen and unheard, the Beast Herders had pushed up the slope to the east, thirsting for revenge.

All at once fire burst up in front of them, but although this was a hindrance it only increased the rage of Ranta and his companions. Ranta caught his dog, muzzling it and tying it to a tree to keep it from bark-



THEY HALTED AND
THREW FIREBRANDS INTO THE BRUSH.

ing, and when this had been done the Beast Herders began to circle around the southern end of the smoke screen, bows and arrows ready.

The Hunting People were meanwhile traveling north along the eastern border of the brush fire they had started. They were watchful, and at the same time confident and unhurried. Munching their chunks of horse meat, they strode along in straggling formation, each man as he saw fit. Talker was coughing from the smoke; otherwise they made no noise at all.

"It is a good trick, this making fire and smoke," murmured Awal.

Juk intended to say something by way of reply to this. His mouth was full of meat and he was busy with his chewing, but as soon as he could speak he meant to agree with Awal. Then before he could get to the words, Juk gave a startled gasp and sprang to one side. An arrow had darted past him, missing Juk and burying itself in the side of the man known as Claw Face.

"Beast Herders!" cried Juk.

No one could have said what happened then, there was so much in so little space of time. Claw Face ran a few steps and fell, rising no more in this world. His companions seized their spears and whirled to attack, but they could see no one, and the arrows came so thickly that they were alarmed. More than that, the arrows

had proved that they knew how to kill men. There was Claw Face, dead as though he had been pierced by a spear, or struck down by a stone hatchet. Karakaa gave his war cry and started for the Beast Herders, but no sooner had he lifted his spear for a throw than an arrow flew past his face, and another arrow brought a howl from Nashad.

"I am hit!" cried Nashad, and seemed amazed that so frail a thing as a flint-pointed stick could hurt him. "Through my arm! Look, it has pierced me!"

Karakaa did not bother to look. He saw that it was an unequal contest, and he had no mind to be slaughtered. With a shout, he turned and fled to the north, calling to his men:

"This way! Keep close to the smoke, so that it will hide us!"

The Hunting People were in headlong flight, Awal scowling to hear Ranta's voice in the brush. Ranta was jeering, and one of his companions was shouting out:

"You have slain our horse herder, and for that we shall destroy you all! Not one, but all, because it takes a whole tribe like you to balance the life of one Beast Herder! Flee, you jackals, but it will do you no good!"

The last of this threat sounded closer than the first of it, and Karakaa's people knew why. The Beast Herders were pursuing them, that was the reason. Claw Face

they had slain, but that was not enough: they longed to kill all of the Hunting People, the whole tribe, none to be spared. Karakaa ducked on through the brush, his men strung out behind him. There were no more flying arrows, but there was the crash of underbrush as their enemies dashed after them, and that was bad enough.

"I am weary of running!" gasped Talker, after a while.

"Would you rather be weary or dead?" retorted Karakaa, and did not slacken his pace.

Juk cast a glance back over his shoulder. Two or three dark heads were bobbing up and down in the brush, and one of them was Ranta's. It seemed to the Flint Chipper that their enemies were gaining, and he told Karakaa this.

"Let everyone run his best," said the chief. "Not his long-running best, but the fastest he can go for a short distance. We must cut off to the left, passing in front of the fire and finding a hiding place before these demons can come upon us."

"I doubt if I can run faster than now," gasped Talker. "I am old."

"Perhaps you are too old," said Goort the wizard. "A man who holds back the tribe is of no more use."

Talker gritted his teeth and leaned forward, running desperately. He was old, but he did not want to die.

Nashad was ahead of him, bothered by the arrow in his arm. Soon Talker was abreast of the wounded man, and drawing up on Juk and Awal. The boys laughed and increased their pace, leaping over rocks and plunging through thickets, as Karakaa struck a course to the northwest. They were heading for the fire, aiming to cross in front of it at so close a margin that their enemies could not follow.

Again Juk glanced back, and this time saw no trace of the Beast Herders. The smoke was too thick; there was no seeing more than a spear's throw in any direction. Ahead of the Hunting People appeared a billowing wall of smoke, red fire below it. The wind had freshened and the flames were racing like some malignant monster bent upon destruction. One by one the fugitives dashed in front of it, calling to one another to keep from being lost in the smoke, and presently coming together on the other side of the fire.

"Listen for our enemies," said Karakaa, breathing hard.

The Beast Herders seem to have been thrown off the track. There was no sign of them, and after a moment's rest Karakaa beckoned his men to follow him north along the western side of the fire. The blazing brush was now between them and their enemies, unless Ranta's people cut across behind the fire, and that was not

likely. Not likely, because there was fire for a long way down the ridge: not even Beast Herders would risk burning themselves by crossing at a point this side of the ledge where the colt had been put to cooking, and if they went farther south they would be too far behind to stand a chance of catching the fugitives.

"We are safe, I think," said Karakaa, "but until the dark comes we cannot be sure."

"Let someone get this arrow out of me," muttered Nashad.

"After night comes to hide us," retorted the chief. "It can wait. The thing is only in your arm."

Juk had been noticing the arrow. It had penetrated the upper part of Nashad's left arm, close to the bone apparently, and with such force that it had gone through the flesh and was sticking out on both sides, like the twig that Goort sometimes put through a hole in his ear lobe. The Flint Chipper stepped forward, saying to Nashad:

"I will take it for you."

"No stopping," said Karakaa.

"We need not stop," said Juk. "Shall I help, Nashad?"

"If you can, yes," muttered the wounded man.

Drawing his knife, Juk cut the stone arrowhead from the shaft, then he took hold of the feathered end of the arrow and gave a quick jerk. Nashad howled with pain, but he was free of the arrow, and relieved.

"You did well," he told Juk. "That was a pleasant turn you did me."

"He did not do it for you," laughed Awal, as Juk put the broken arrow into his pouch. "Our young flint chipper wanted an arrow to copy, that was his purpose."

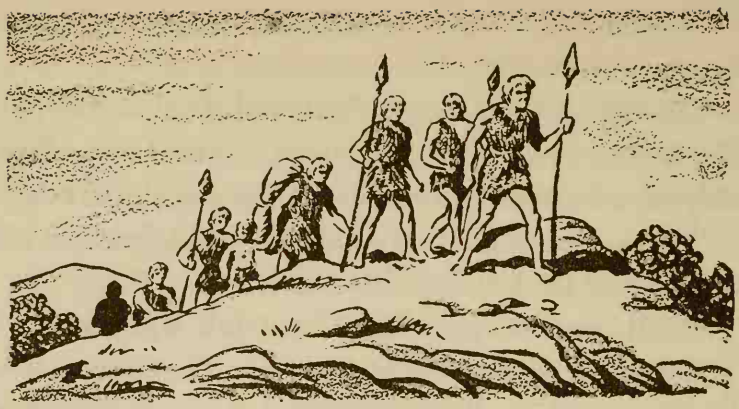
"Ah, so that was it!" frowned Nashad, clutching his arm to stop the bleeding.

"Shall I put the arrow back?" said Juk, with a grin.

Karakaa was gesturing to the west. The sun was going down, and in a little while the darkness would cover their retreat. They kept on, venturing a little farther from the smoke of the brush fire, and going at a slower pace. Twilight spread in the world, and after twilight came dusk, making the fire look brighter by contrast and giving the Hunting People new confidence. Only one thing stuck in their minds, and that was the ominous thing which the Beast Herders had shouted after them.

"You have slain our horse herder, and for that we shall destroy you all!" they had shouted. "Not one, but all, because it takes a whole tribe like you to balance the life of one Beast Herder! Flee, you jackals, but it will do you no good!"

Somehow the Hunting People did not like that. It was only a threat, but also it could be prophecy. . . .



CHAPTER XIII

From Now On It Is War

AWHILE after moonrise Karakaa brought his men to Two-hole Cave, where the women and children of the tribe were waiting. Talker was there, too, and with him the one who had helped play the part of howling wolves.

"Claw Face was killed," said Karakaa, and when the dead man's wife began to wail and tear her hair the chief said further: "Stop it, or draw back into the cave where the racket will not come to us. There are sober important things to settle. Take yourself off!"

The woman drew away out of sight, and she had others of her kind with her as company and consolation, but the men paid no attention. Karakaa and his warriors sat in a circle on the ground; they spoke of all that had happened that day, and the first to tell his tale was Talker.

"Our wolf howls drew them," he said, "and afterward we slipped around to watch what happened. The Beast Herders gave up the chase. They turned back, and we saw them go into their camp. There the women fell to howling about the man who was slain and the horses that were stolen, and the fighting men of the tribe rushed down the valley. Farther down they split, and—"

"That we know," said Karakaa. "What of the Yellers?"

"Certain horses went over into the western valley," replied Talker, "and the Beast Herders went there and fetched them back. Do you know how they managed it?"

The wizard made an impatient gesture. "If we knew," he snapped, "we should not have to listen to your chatter. Tell it."

"The Beast Herders got back the horses," said Talker, "because they first defeated the Yellers."

"What!" cried Karakaa in surprise.

"The Yellers came running and screaming," continued the old man, "but they had no arrows and the Beast Herders did have arrows. The horse people shot them down, one after another, until the Yellers still alive and on their feet turned and fled. It is odd what these arrows can do."

Nashad pointed to his swollen left arm, torn in two places by the passing of an arrow.

"I could say that," he told Talker, "if you had not already said it. May the demons of the pond destroy these Beast Herders."

Karakaa rose to his feet, silent and hard-eyed. He spoke no more that night, but when morning came he had made up his mind.

"We must find a better and more secret camp," he told his people. "Our enemies will be looking for us."

Accordingly, the tribe moved into a certain lonely ravine, and the next day they knew that Karakaa had acted wisely. For the Beast Herders did come looking for them, not once but many times. The strangers searched and the Hunting People hid, waiting for the enemy to move camp so that they could slink away to another place.

It was a grim game the two tribes played in the woods that spring, and since the Beast Herders did not catch their prey, and yet were determined to, the game dragged

on into summer. At times it seemed that Ranta's people had given up the chase, then unexpectedly a hunting party would appear, and Karakaa must lead another retreat.

The Hunting People never gave open battle. Because they were cowards? No, not really. They were as brave as most men of their time and age, but it struck them as senseless to fight at a double disadvantage. Goort's magic had failed to destroy the strangers, and that proved them warriors of extraordinary power. Aside from that, the Beast Herders had better weapons; their arrows went to the mark from afar, whereas the spears of the Hunting People were weak and uncertain at a similar distance. Karakaa's men came to fear those arrows with a nightmare intensity. An arrow had killed Claw Face, although Claw Face had survived many spear wounds and also the attack of a deadly bear. Nashad had been wounded by a second arrow, and his arm made such fever in him that often his companions had to spring up in the night and stuff his mouth with deerhide to keep him from raving in delirium and thus betraying their whereabouts to the Beast Herders.

"I will do magic against the arrows," Goort had said, but no one believed that it would do any good.

And it did not. The wizard had destroyed mud images and still their enemies lived; now he went off

by himself and danced and muttered charms, but though he came back glistening with sweat the passing days brought a new offensive from the Beast Herders. The strangers continued hearty and revengeful, so persistent in their war against Karakaa's tribe that the Hunting People were appalled.

"We killed their horse watcher and they killed Claw Face," complained Talker one day. "That is even, and the score marked out; but our enemies will not have it so. What do they want?"

"They want to slay us every one," said the chief grimly.

So it seemed, and now a superstitious dread was added to their troubles. It was bad enough to fear the strangers, it was worse to have to believe that the Beast Herders were fated to destroy them to the last man. Even Juk and Awal lost their cheerfulness after that. Human foes they were used to, but when the demons sided with these enemies it was well-nigh a hopeless case. Wearily the fugitives trailed through the woods, still clinging to the region which was their traditional home, but forced to keep to cover, like so many moles when owls are hunting. They gave up making fire because of the telltale smoke. Berries were ripening now, and they ate these, together with green nuts and whatever flesh they could stomach raw. Many a meal they made on bird's eggs,

or nestlings dried in the sun, or snails crushed and mixed with the bulbs of marsh plants.

Then one rainy morning Nashad did a thing which changed the pattern of their wretched slinking life. The Beast Herders appeared, and Karakaa signaled his men to retreat, but Nashad would not. For days now he had had no peace with his infected left arm; fever and despairing rage and a mad yearning for revenge had got into Nashad's blood. He did not retreat, but seized his spear and hurled it at the leader of the Beast Herders. The spear fell short and three arrows pierced Nashad, one lodging in his neck and cutting off the cry he had meant to be a war cry.

"Retreat," Karakaa shouted to the others, and they all ran, and did not stop until they were safe again. Safe? Who could be safe with such demons hunting them! The death of Nashad was too much. Karakaa said, very abruptly: "We must move to the back hills, abandoning this side of the world to our enemies. And we go at once, no longer delaying. It is hopeless here."

Silently they followed him, gaunt and dull-eyed and discouraged. There were grizzly bears in the back hills, but it did not matter. North into the hill country they must make their way, and somehow find new hunting grounds.

"Ah!" said Juk all at once.

"What is it?" demanded Awal.

"A thing worth speaking of," was the reply. "Karakaa!"

"Keep silent," said the chief moodily, for the Beast Herders were chasing him out of his tribal territory, and that was disgrace.

"No one should keep silent if it means good things lost," retorted Juk. "We go north, and not far from the flint mine. Good; we should stop there for new weapon-making stuff, seeing that we need it."

That was true. Some of the men had lost their spears, others had chipped and dulled their stone weapons. Every one of them could stand a little new flint, and the mine was the place to get it.

"We shall go there," said the chief shortly.

Juk was pleased, but no one else appeared to be. In order to reach the flint they would have to bear off to the northwest a bit, crossing two ridges and as many thorny ravines, and the extra traveling was a sore trial. The people of the tribe were near exhaustion—bodies undernourished, nerves jangling, courage low and stagnant. Heavily they plodded along, hungry yet without the energy to hunt. A wild sow and a litter of pigs scampered out of the trail, but not even Big Foot tried to overtake them. The fugitives could think of nothing save escape and a chance to sleep and rest.

"You have put extra aches in my legs, with this trip to the mine," Awal grumbled at Juk.

"We need flint," was the reply; "and it is not much farther. Over the next slope and we can see it. Already there are paths."

The paths were a sign that the flint quarry was close at hand. That is what it had been in the dim and distant past—quarry, nothing more. Upon a stretch of barren upland, dotted with a few junipers and dwarfed firs, but otherwise carpeted only by gorse and heather and gray bleak rocks, there was anciently an outcropping of the flint which primitive men prized as we of today prize iron ore. Flint was the raw material of tools and weapons, and probably the earliest of Britain's inhabitants knew and used such outcroppings. Using their bare hands, and sometimes rocks, and later making good use of deer antlers, these people got flint and shaped it to their needs. Knowledge of the site spread. More tribes came to get flint. The last of the exposed stone was taken, but men scraped away dirt and uncovered more. A hole appeared, the hole became the pit, the pit a quarry. From all directions people came for flint, making paths across the uplands as they went to and fro.

These phehistoric visitors did not linger long, but slipped up furtively, got their flint and hurried off, lest they encounter some tribe also there for stone. Thus

it had been since the beginning, and now, as Karakaa led his men over the last ridge and they saw the site of the mine, they did this same thing: they paused, wanting to be sure that there was no one there.

"Ha, but there is!" exclaimed Awal. "I see a sentinel, watching at the top of the mine!"

"Let us shout and see if he will run," said Karakaa; "he and the others who are with him. All of us must yell together, to seem as many as possible."

The Hunting People let out a great noise, and in the time that it takes a bird to flap its wings there were men standing at the top of the mine. There were fewer of them than there were of Karakaa's men, so that the chief took heart.

"It is only a few hill people," he said. "We can frighten them away."

The ones at the mine stood and gawked, wondering what to do, then suddenly they darted off in the other direction. Karakaa and his people were dashing toward the mine, shouting and waving their spears. The Hunting People trotted up the slope with triumphant faces, glad that the strangers had been so few and hence so easy to scare off.

"Gone, all gone!" laughed Juk. "They are all gone, and we can get flint."

All gone? No. One among the miners had lingered

at the bottom of a shaft, confident that his friends could hold the place against the newcomers who stood at a distance and shouted. When Karakaa had come running forward, this tardy miner began to clamber up into the open, to flee with his companions; but there was no time. A hasty look and he had jerked back down out of sight, still in the mine, though none of the Hunting People suspected it.

Juk came up to the brink of the mine, still laughing. He loved the place and he had not been here since early spring. Now he meant to enjoy himself, choosing as much stone as he could carry away, and afterward working on it at his leisure. Eagerly he gazed down the shaft, the great, roughly circular hole which centuries of flint diggers had dug to a depth of perhaps forty feet. A strong leathern rope went down from the top, a crude stick basket tied to the other end. Who had provided this means of hauling flint to the surface of the mine? Some forgotten savage who saw that rope and basket saved labor, just as still earlier someone else had used a rope without a basket. When the rope broke or frayed in two, that day's miners repaired it; when the basket acquired so many holes that stone would not stay in it, someone patched it up. No one took away the rope and basket, even though they knew that their enemies used these things in their absence. The rope and basket, and simi-

lar tools at the bottom of the mine—these things were one of the earliest signs of co-operation among hostile tribes. Meeting face to face they would have attacked each other; nevertheless they worked together in the mines, not physically, nor at identical moments, but in alternation, turn and turn about. People co-operated like this for long ages before they dared to come together and labor with one another in the flesh.

"Let Talker stand guard," said Karakaa, after a careful look around the top of the mine. "And the women and children will go down the slope to the northeast, to be ready to run in case people come and chase *us* away. The rest of us will go into the shaft for flint."

It was so arranged. Talker sat down with his spear, Karakaa grasped the leathern rope and began to descend the shaft, his bare feet feeling out niches which had been cut into the side wall. Karakaa, then Big Foot, and after Big Foot the two boys, Juk ahead of Awal. Down and down they went, fetching up on the bottom and peering around for a torch. They could see without it, but the best flint was in certain horizontal tunnels which ran out from the base of this main shaft, and work in these tunnels called for a light.

"Ha!" said Awal, picking up a torch from behind a pile of rejected flint fragments. "Look, the stick is still smoking."

"Light it," said Karakaa briefly.

Awal kindled fire, but Juk looked around for tools. There were pieces of staghorn about, and also many battered wedges and mallets made of oak wood. Juk chose a mallet and hunted for a chisel-like implement which he had made himself and had left at the mine. It was gone.

"Perhaps it is in one of the tunnels," he thought.

They began to gather flint, Karakaa and Big Foot content to pick over the heap of fragments at the bottom of the main shaft, Juk eager to find the better flint which he knew to be in the tunnel. Awal took the torch and got down on his hands and knees, crawling into a dark passageway to show Juk the way. The tunnel was high enough to sit up in, and presently Awal halted and made himself comfortable, holding the torch while Juk knocked at projecting masses of brown and yellow flint. The stuff occurred in seams and in this particular passage it alternated with layers of chalk; Juk's method, therefore, was to break away the chalk and then strike the flint a sharp blow from above.

"This is fair in quality and the others can have it. The inner tunnel has better, and I must have some of that for you and me."

"Let it go," said Awal. "You would need your chisel for that, and someone has taken it."

"You mean that you always bump your head in that inner tunnel," laughed Juk. "Come, it will not take long."

Awal grumbled but he did as Juk asked. They crawled into a farther tunnel, a mere hole in the rock where it was impossible to sit upright, the ceiling was so low. Juk knocked loose a few pieces of superior flint, and by that time Karakaa was calling to the boys to come out.

"We have enough!" shouted the chief. "Now we must get on our way. This is no place to linger."

Promptly Awal turned and started out of the tunnel, but Juk had seen something he wanted to examine in clearer light.

"Give me the torch," he said. "I think my chisel is at the back of this passage."

Awal handed over the torch and crawled into the outer tunnel to wait for him. The Flint Chipper turned and made his way toward the back of the passage. There was a pile of chalk and flint rejects at the end of the tunnel, and it had seemed to the boy that he caught the reflection of torchlight upon his missing chisel.

It was indeed his chisel. Juk had made the thing of the thick strong horn which hunters find just above a stag's skull, before the antlers begin to divide and grow more slender. He picked it up, pleased that no one had taken it away from the mine. The chisel was Juk's con-

tribution to the working tools which were common property here, and it had bothered him to think it was gone.

"Come on," said Awal impatiently.

Juk turned to go, then a strange feeling went over him. Something was wrong! There was a living creature in the tunnel with him, Juk's instinct told him that. For a moment he was terrified, then he tried to tell himself that it was impossible; and failing in that, he decided that it was some small animal. Now and then a four-foot fell into the mine and stayed there until a party of visitors came for flint, and killed it. Perhaps there was a marmot or hedgehog behind the pile of rubbish at the end of the tunnel. Yes, and if there were it would be worth killing. Meat had been scarce with the Hunting People of late; even a hare would taste good.

Slowly Juk faced the end of the tunnel. He had left his spear outside the mine, but he had his dagger, and that would certainly be enough of a weapon.

"Are you coming?" demanded Awal. "The others are starting up the rope."

"Soon I am with you," said Juk. He did not say any more than that, for the joking Awal had a sharp tongue, and it would not do to claim too much.

The Flint Chipper held the torch in his left hand,

and with his right he drew the dagger. A bit at a time, he wormed his way toward the pile of rubbish, peering and listening. There was no sound, but he saw something. It was a dark, bulky object, its outline confused by the shifting shadows. Suddenly it shrank back, and Juk knew that it was a living thing. He moved the torch a little, wanting to see better. The light glinted into the creature's eyes.

"H'm," though Juk, "those eyes are large and far apart. It is a sizable animal, whatever it is."

Then he knew what it was. The eyes met his; he recognized the "animal" as a human being. It was Ranta!

For a long tense moment the boys stared at each other, Juk amazed, Ranta wary as a wild beast and expecting no mercy. He had come to the flint mine with a few of his tribe, wanting stone for weapons; the coming of the Hunting People had sent his companions scurrying to safety, and the laggard Ranta had been caught in the mine. He had crawled into this tunnel as far as he could go, when Juk had accidentally discovered him.

"It is you," gasped the Flint Chipper.

"Yes," said Ranta, clutching his stone knife.

Juk looked at the knife, then he glanced at his own dagger. Wonderingly, his gaze returned to Ranta's face. Their eyes locked together, the beginnings of friendship

playing back and forth between them as fragile strands of caterpillar silk might bind two leaves together to make a nest of them.

"Are you coming?" cried Awal. "I am going."

"Yes, I am coming," answered Juk, and he gazed wide-eyed at Ranta, whispering: "Stay here until we have gone."

That was all. Ranta did not answer, and Juk said nothing further. Turning with the torch, he made his way back to the main shaft, picked up the pieces of flint that Awal had dropped, and clambered up the rope. Everyone except Talker had gone down the slope to the northeast, and the tired old man was about to follow them.

"Some day you will linger in that flint mine for too long," said Talker, as they started off together.

Juk scarcely heard him. He was thinking of another who had lingered in the mine, one who was his enemy and yet was escaping death. It was a strange thing. Why had Juk let him go? The Flint Chipper ought to have called the others, and then in spite of Ranta's struggles he would have been killed.

Killed. Dead. Perhaps that was what had held Juk back, closing his mouth and sending him out of the mine without betraying Ranta. It is a bad thing to be dead. No one knows quite what happens after you have been

killed, but certainly it is a horrid experience. Strangers are enemies, and enemies should be slain, and Ranta belonged to an enemy tribe, but still. . . . Juk could not understand it. He did not want to see Ranta killed, and he could not quite fathom the reason for this feeling. Friendship with a boy in a hostile tribe was too new an idea, too dangerous, too revolutionary.

"He cast a magic spell upon me," he muttered.

"Someone did, that is certain," said a voice.

The Flint Chipper jerked up his head. Awal was in front of him, the others of the tribe with him, and all of them frowning or laughing at Juk.

"What is this talk of a magic spell?" demanded Goort.

"Talk and only talk," said Juk in confusion; "foolish talk having no root."

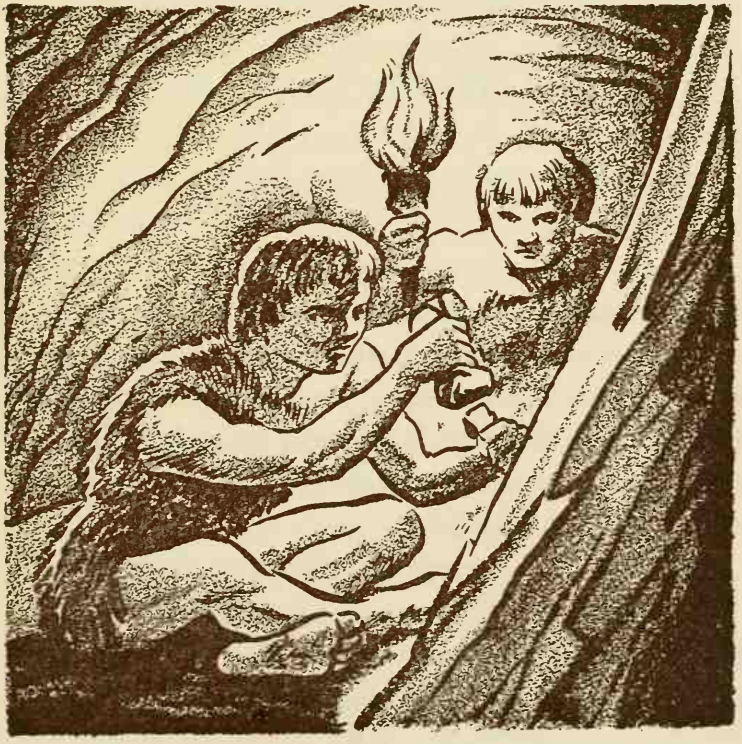
The wizard grunted and turned away. The tribe started on again, the men carrying only their weapons, the women burdened with sleeping robes and also with the jagged masses of flint which had been taken from the mine.

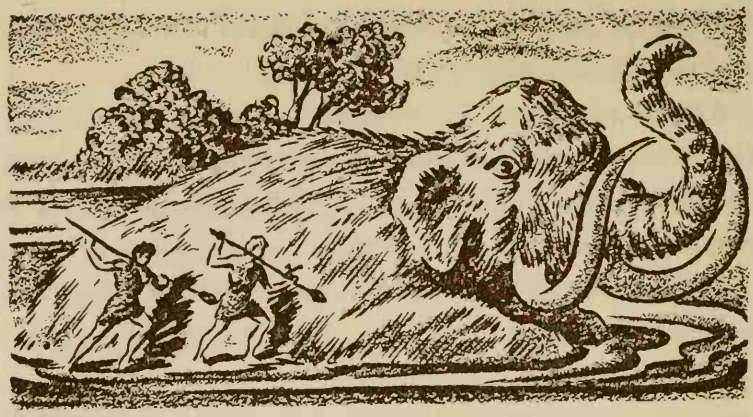
Juk alone did not turn over his flint to some stoop-shouldered woman. He had forgotten it; his head was still in a turmoil. All he could think of was Ranta, and the strange thing which he had done for him. On and on he trudged, following the others until twilight came and Karakaa halted for the night. Awal spoke to him

and got no answer, and that irked Awal so that he went and sat alone, ignoring his friend.

Dusk settled upon the world, then suddenly and without warning there was a loud bellowing from somewhere. The Hunting People sprang to their feet, alarmed by so deep and formidable a sound.

"What is that?" demanded Karakaa, and no one could tell him.





CHAPTER XIV

The Last Mammoth

THE bellowing stopped, but soon it began again, a sound filled with rage and yet so mournful that it seemed to issue from some great monster imprisoned in the earth. Deep and hollow and ground-shaking, the noise came through the dusk to the Hunting People, stiffening them with fright.

"It is a grizzly," muttered Talker.

Talker was the only one to speak, and even he did not believe that it was a grizzly bear. He had made words out of habit, for he was a man who could not keep still

for long, whether he had anything sensible to say or not.

A grizzly! It was no more the roar of a grizzly than it was the drumming of a partridge! Neither grizzly nor the giant elk whose bulk made deer look like hares, and whose antlers spread to twice the length of a man. And there were no other huge beasts in the land, except wild bulls, and this was clearly no bull.

"Um-m," said Karakaa. The rumbling bellow had stopped again.

That was a vast relief, yet very likely it would begin again. What were the Hunting People to do? It would be madness to flee, because they were not sure of which way to run, and since it was dark they could have no hope of finding a better camp than this, a better camp or a safer one. Not that this one was safe. There were no trees to climb, no high ledges or rock to clamber onto. Altogether it was a dangerous spot, and yet they must stay here until dawn, monster or no monster.

"We must rouse up," said Big Foot at length. "There is a wild beast near us, and if we sit here like this we shall be no better than mice under the paws of a fox."

"There are demons abroad tonight," gulped the wizard. "Build up the fire."

The chief had recovered his wits. "Kindle more fires," he said, "so that the blaze is a circle all around us. That will protect us against the Thing out there."

It was done. Feverishly they got fires to going, Juk and Awal and even Karakaa helping the women with this task. Bright, encouraging flames leaped up all about the camp, and though the bellowing came again it did not terrify them as before. True, they were frightened, but at least they could move their limbs and whisper through their dry lips. The women and children huddled together in a knot, the men squatted with their spears in hand, listening and staring into the darkness.

Whenever the rumble of the monster's cry broke the stillness Karakaa and his men trembled and gazed to the west, because the sound came from that direction. But after the cry had faded away into the aching silence the hunters craned round to the east, because it was there that the first traces of dawn would appear. Mutely they watched for the end of the horrid and seemingly endless night, wanting the reassuring day to come, so that at least they could see where to run.

All night they crouched there, Awal finally sleeping, but Juk unable to close his eyes. It seemed as if demons had strangled the sun and it would never come again, but finally the darkness thinned and lightened. A new breeze stirred, the eastern horizon was free of black obscuring shadow. The Hunting People stared at it, noting with a gratitude too profound for words that dawn was about to break. The terrible night was over,

day was coming! Stiffly the men dared to rise to their feet, once more breathing freely, hoping again and believing in the goodness of life. The gray of the eastern sky changed to rose, the glorious light spread and spread. Awal awakened, a smile on his sunburned face.

"Perhaps the monster has gone," he said.

"Sh-h-h," said Goort. "Talk like that will tempt the beast to come after us."

Karakaa took his spear and poked a woman who was still asleep. "Up," he said; "we are traveling. Follow me, and be ready to seize your children by the throat, in case they utter cries. There must be no noise."

The tribe got under way, Karakaa leading off to the northeast. Their route lay north, but the monster had bellowed at them from the west, therefore they must shift their course. In and out among rocks the chief led them, then he spied a kind of stony hillock. He halted, pondered a moment, and announced a plan.

"We shall pass on the east side of that hillock," he said, "but when it hides us from the west we shall climb it and peep off toward where the monster was, to see what can be seen."

"If it was a demon," warned Goort, "that will be bad. Demons do not like people to be curious."

"This is not curiosity," retorted the chief; "for our better safety we should know what it was."

Goort shrugged, and they did as Karakaa wanted. Behind the hillock they turned and climbed the slope, more and more cautious as they approached the top. Juk was ahead of everyone save the chief, his fear chased away by eagerness to know what the monster was, and if it still lingered in the nearness. Awal jerked him back and tried to get ahead of him, but the Flint Chipper scrambled out of reach and kept on.

Then they saw it, Juk and Awal and all the others who cared to look. The rising sun had flooded the uplands with light, already driving away the thickest of the morning mist. West of the hillock there was an expanse of swamp land, gray rocks and blotches of foul black water and a tangle of low wiry bushes and sedgelike grasses. It was a desolate spot, bleak, fantastic, with upward-twisting wraiths of fog and apparently lifeless—save for the monster. The creature was stranded in the swamp; it had bogged down, and its bellowings the night before had been cries of distress and fury at finding itself caught. Bulky and long-haired and unreal, the thing stood in the swamp, great tusks curling down out of its huge domed head.

"I never saw such an animal," gasped Awal.

"It is a mammoth," whispered Karakaa.

The Hunting People gazed in wonder, and many of them believed that they saw a thing which did not

exist, a kind of reflection of something, such as you see in certain light-checkered woods, or in deep shimmering pools of water. A mammoth? Neither Awal nor Juk had ever seen one, and the same was true of Big Foot, and the wizard, and Karakaa himself. The chief had recognized the brute from tales he had heard, and from footprints he had once found in the forest. Then as they gaped at the mammoth Talker began to speak.

"I am old," he said, "and I have seen many things, but this is only the second mammoth I have ever had before my eyes. The first was when I was a boy, and the memory of it had become so dim that it was lately just a dream memory; yet here is another, and it is the last."

"What do you mean?" said Juk.

"You are too young to know," returned the old man, "but I will tell you, and all others who have ears I will tell. The monster you see there is the last of its kind. Legends have grown up around it, this solitary beast which for so many years has had no mate, because certain hill tribes slew the mate. The last mammoth, wandering the world alone and so wary of men that no people have got close enough to kill it. When I was in the prime of life, and able to throw a spear with the best of you, so few men had seen this brute that it was called a phantom, a thing making huge tracks in damp meadows but never appearing in the flesh. And it was said

that if anyone could slay the mammoth, this last one of its kind, the strength and courage of all its race would flow magically into the slayers and they would thenceforth be the mightiest warriors in the hills. Yet no one chanced upon the creature."

Big Foot wet his lips. "No one ever chanced upon it," he murmured, "but we have done that."

"Also it is in a swamp and held fast," said Karakaa. "Let us fall upon it and kill it, and the red meat will strengthen us."

"We should do that," Goort agreed. "I, too, know of the legend which Talker tells, of how the force and brave fighting spirits of all the mammoth race will flow into those who slay the last one. It is our great chance, since the monster is mired down and cannot move."

Shivers of excitement passed up and down Juk's spine. His life had been filled with hazard and adventures, but never had he imagined himself upon a mammoth hunt. And this was such a hunt, for Karakaa had seized his spear and was striding down the hillock, his men strung out behind him and the fearful women and children lurking in the rear.

The tribesmen got to the bottom of the slope and went more slowly, aware of the task ahead of them. A mammoth was not a hare, to be seized by the hind legs. It was the hugest of all the four-foots in Britain, less

formidable than the saber-tooth tiger, but the saber-tooth had long been extinct, only his tusks and an occasional skull lying in the gloom of a cave to affright a chance exploring hunter. The hide of a mammoth was said to be thicker than a man's hand is broad, and legend claimed that the creature's breath could put the stoutest warrior into a staggering daze, which on the third rising of the sun would bring death. So it was necessary to go with care.

"He is bellowing again!" exclaimed Awal.

"Do you think no one can hear that, and you must tell them!" Karakaa retorted. "Be quiet. The beast is not far. I can see it through the bushes."

The hunters planned to slip up and spear the helpless brute from behind, but the mammoth did not fit in with this scheme. All night the mammoth had floundered in the bog, trumpeting wildly and fearing the approach of enemies, and now those enemies were coming. The beast turned its massive head and saw them; then before the Hunting People knew what was happening the mammoth wrenched itself loose. It got a leg free, lunged to one side and drew a second leg out of the bog. A loud popping sound came from the mud, then another lunge and the brute was out of its hole.

"Look out!" cried Karakaa.

The hunters scattered in alarm, but the mammoth

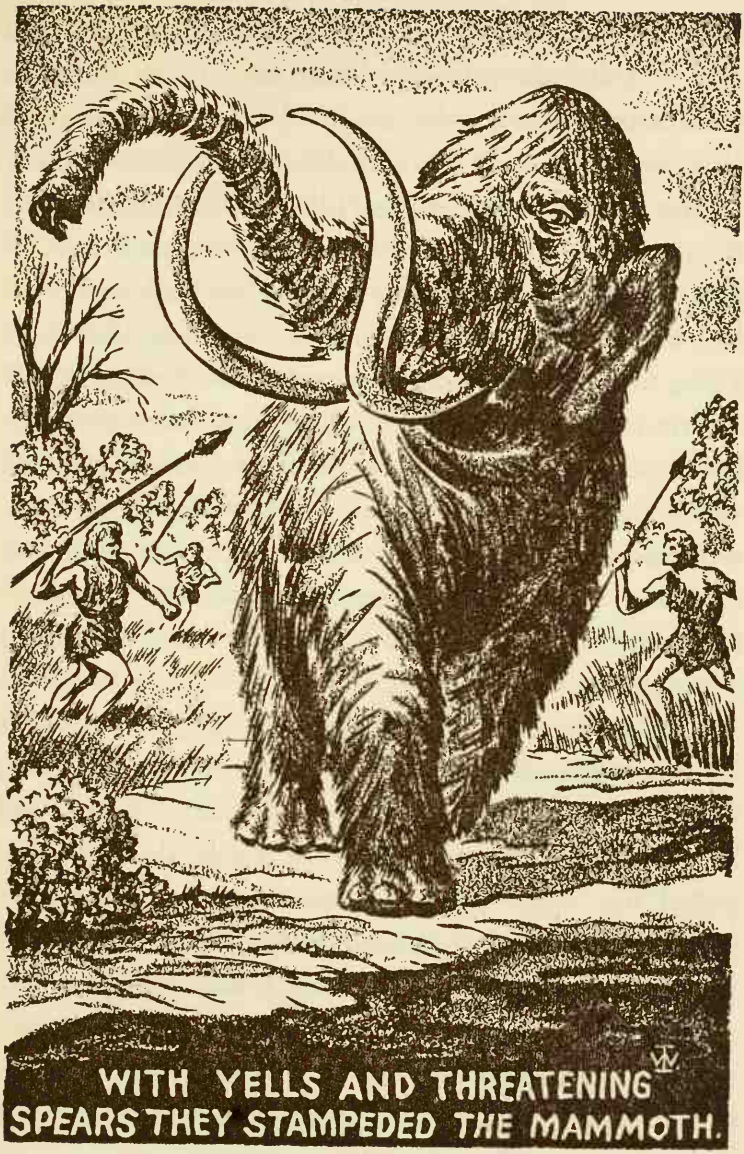
did not attack. It feared men as much as men feared it, and now that the sight of them had given it the desperate strength to wrench itself free, the creature fled. Caked with mud and breathing hoarsely, it lumbered off to the north, the Hunting People at first relieved and then dismayed.

"Let us chase it!" cried Awal. "It will fall into another bog, and this time stay."

"That can be made to happen," said Big Foot. "The mammoth fears us, therefore it will run from our shouts and spears. We can send it toward the swamp. Come!"

"It is worth a trial," admitted Karakaa. "The women and children stay here, and keep out of the way."

Juk and Awal dashed forward with Karakaa and the older men. The mammoth was out of sight in the brush which bordered the swamp on the east, but they soon overtook the brute. Cutting to the right, they ran until they were abreast of it; then with yells and threatening spears they stampeded it off to the west. It fell into a murky pool and lurched out again, shambled on and began to feel the clutch of mud which gave no footing but only let it sink and sink. The great weight of the creature bore it down; it settled to its knees, struggled and sank a little lower. By the time that the cautious hunters drew near the mammoth's legs had disappeared, the body resting directly upon the mud.



WITH YELLS AND THREATENING SPEARS THEY STAMPEDED THE MAMMOTH.

"We have trapped it!" cried Karakaa, certain at last that it could not get free. "Call the women and have them bring limbs and branches for us to stand upon, so that we can spear it without sinking into the swamp!"

The women came up, fearful in the beginning, and then at ease. Clearly the mammoth was stuck fast. It had stopped wrenching and lunging, its little eyes glaring at the hunters as it waited to see what they were going to do. Karakaa and his men came close to it, still a little frightened and yet bold, because they knew they had captured the mightiest of all the animals in the land where they dwelt. They gazed at it with intense curiosity, noting the coarse long hair, the curving tusks and snakelike trunk, the tremendous head and enormous body, the tail which was like a willow stick, as the legs in turn were like oak trees.

"Watch its trunk," said Goort warningly. "It blows its breath through that, and the breath could poison you, like the foul air in a newly opened cave. There is evil in that trunk. Beasts do not have trunks that are noses pulled out long. Anciently this creature must have plagued some demon, and the demon seized its nose and pulled it out to this length. That is how it happened."

Juk and Awal might have been interested in the story another time, but not now. The women were coming up with arms full of fir and yew branches; they dumped

them down and went for more, and the men took the branches and began to pile them between the spot where they themselves stood and the spot where the mammoth was mired down. Little by little they built a kind of path across the swampy ground; then they prepared to attack.

"I will test my spear on the brute," said Karakaa. "What it does to him will show how the mammoth will act, struggling or not struggling, as the case may be."

The chief stepped forward. The mammoth faced to the left, so that its heart was on the side toward them. Karakaa meant to pierce its heart. With all his strength he lifted his spear and plunged down with it, striking the creature some distance behind the foreleg. Instantly the mammoth began to trumpet and rumble, lurching frantically in the attempt to get out of the bog. It rose a little way, the mud popping under it. The hunters retreated, but the animal was already sinking back into place. The chief looked at his spear, then at the tiny wound he had made in the creature's side.

"This is truly the mightiest of beasts!" he exclaimed. "I struck hard enough to pierce a bear to the heart, and the mammoth scarcely felt it! Now let us rush upon him all together."

They lost no more time. Each man seized his spear and advanced, some aiming at a spot just before the hind

leg, others thinking to penetrate between the ribs, a few thrusting for the heart, but no one ventured to go beyond the foreleg, for fear of the mammoth's trunk. The spears rose and fell, the unhappy victim struggled and sank back. A rumble of despair came from its throat; it lifted its writhing trunk and let out a shrill call which so unnerved Juk that he fumbled a spear thrust.

What was the beast calling? Its mate had been slain years ago; it was alone, no others of its kind alive in the English hills, and no living thing able or willing to come to its rescue. The great brute was doomed. Cousin to the elephant, it was nevertheless a more primitive beast, a wild and hairy antediluvian monster fated to perish from the earth.

How strange that was, when once the mammoth was a lordly thing, striding upright and unafraid in a world which so affrighted our puny ancestors that they ran from a herd of mammoths as rats would run from men. There were mammoths in the days of glaciers, in the days when England was still joined to the continent, the days when human hunters dared not attack any creature larger than a hare or a bird. Thus it had been in the ancient past, but the mammoth had lived on into a changed world, seeing its own kind vanish, watching with fearful wrath the rise of men, year by year grow-

ing more clever and powerful, until here in this bog the last mammoth was sinking under the blows of an enemy it had once despised.

Once more the wretched beast lifted up its voice, trumpeting in shrill despair, and getting no answer. An epoch was closing. Henceforth it was to be a modern world, an existence dominated by men. The mammoth's trunk wavered and sank down upon the swamp, the hunters thrust and jabbed with their spears. The poor brute was dead.

"Dead, dead!" Karakaa cried, and all his men joined him, and likewise the women and children. "Dead, the mammoth is dead! It is the last of its kind and we have slain it! Ho ho, ho, ho ho, ho!"

"Now let there be fire, so that we can eat," said Talker. "We are weak from hunger, and there is much red meat here!"

The women needed no urging. They seized their flint knives and ran for wood, and the men put aside their spears and began to dig away the mud from the near side of the mammoth. For this was no roe deer, to cast propped up over red coals of fire; this present kill was so large and heavy that it must be cooked on the spot where it had been slain. More than that, a pit must be dug down along the side of the creature and partly under it, the fire going to the mammoth rather than the mam-

moth coming to the fire. With stone knives and bare hands and hastily contrived wooden paddles the men tore away the mud, soaking up a share of the water with fir boughs and then digging again.

It was hard dirty work, yet no one minded. Fatigue and hunger and discouragement, all these things were forgotten. The Hunting People had killed the most powerful beast in the hills, and as a consequence their pulses were racing and their mouths laughing joyously. The mammoth had fallen to their spears, that was all that mattered just now.

"The pit is deep enough," said Karakaa. "Now make fire, some of you!"

A fire was kindled and wood piled on. Smoke rose up, followed in time by the delicious odor of roasting meat. Big Foot and Awal climbed onto the mammoth from the rump and hacked loose a triangle of thick hide just at the base of the shoulder, then Karakaa threw them a stout leathern rope and this was tied through a hole in the bit of loosened hide. Afterward all the men of the tribe came and pulled on the rope, and by this means they ripped the section of skin away from the side of the mammoth, so that the meat would cook sooner. Bits of fat dropped into the fire and blazed up hotly, and the hunters laughed and looked at the mammoth and showed their teeth, smiling the smile of primitive man.

We of today smile for many reasons, but our rude ancestors grimaced chiefly in anticipation of food, or so we think. Trace the smile back to its beginning and you will probably find that it was a drawing back of the lips as a preliminary to biting into meat. Grinning and swallowing and making eager sounds with their mouths, the hunters watched the mammoth cook, then silently Goort the wizard began to hop up and down in a ceremonial dance.

"What is he up to?" Juk whispered to Awal.

"He dances out of pleasure, I think," said Awal.

No, that was not it. Goort had something in mind, some purpose, some magical scheme that as yet no one else understood. Suddenly the wizard took a stick and shoved it through the hole in the lobe of his left ear, then he opened his pouch and took out a kernel of red ocher and a bit of black. Also he took a sharp bone instrument, and while the others of the tribe stared the wizard unfastened the thong which held his robe up over one shoulder. The robe fell as far as his waist; his chest was bare, and on it there appeared the dread and mystic signs which had always filled Juk and Awal with such dread. Dots and lines of red had been tattooed into Goort's skin, and there was a ring marked with black ocher. No one knew what these designs meant, but they were sacred and magically powerful, and the wizard

revealed them only under the gravest and most unusual circumstances.

Now he put a little red pigment onto the end of the bone instrument and jabbed it into his chest, in this way forcing the color under the skin, where it would remain, like the tattooing which we know today. A red spot, then a black one, and so on, both colors in alternation, while he danced and muttered, and everyone gaped at him. Then at last he chose to say what was in his mind.

"The last mammoth is dead," he chanted, as he hopped about. "It is dead and we have slain it. The strength of all the race of mammoths passes into us when we eat this meat, as a hunter's eye becomes keen as an eagle's after he had eaten an eagle's eye, and people grow cunning by devouring the heart and brain of a fox. No other tribe could slay the mammoth, but we have done it; therefore we shall be the greatest of two-footed fighters, and no people shall be able to stand against us."

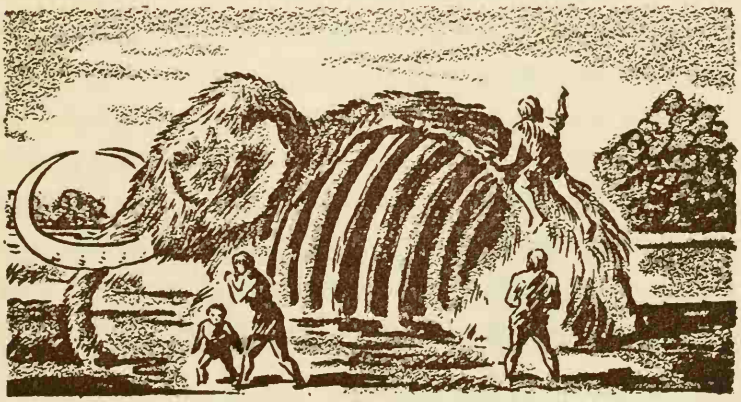
"It is true!" shouted Karakaa, suddenly understanding the drift of all this. "We shall run no farther from the Beast Herders who have taken our hunting grounds. No, we shall stop running, and we shall put our weapons in order and return to the south, and when we meet our enemies we shall give them battle and slay them, because the courage and strength of the mammoth is ours!"

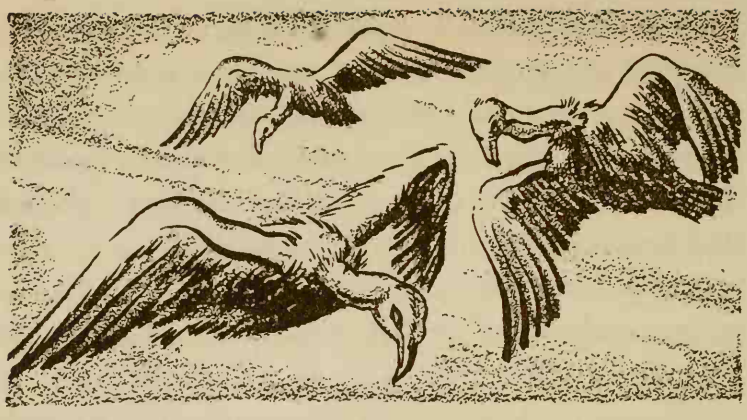
"You speak well!" Goort cried back at him. "With this bone instrument I put red and black into my skin, red for our life, and black which means death for our enemies. The Beast Herders we shall slay, every one of them, and even to the women and children, because they are an evil breed and deserve to die!"

"Let us eat, then!" cried Big Foot. "I am willing to go against the Beast Herders, but first we need red meat in us."

"The meat is done!" others began to shout. "We must fill our mouths with it. Let us eat, let us eat, so that we may be strong for what we have to do!"

And Juk ate with the others, thinking once more of Ranta and what would be his fate; whether he would escape the attack which the Hunting People were planning, or whether he would yield up his life as the mammoth had done.





CHAPTER XV

Let Them Beware

ALL day they feasted, ripping chunks of meat from the mammoth and devouring the strong red stuff in great gulps. It was good, neither soft nor flabby, but tough, as becomes a warrior's meat. They took chunks of it and ate it sitting down cross-legged, or when they felt like it they danced around in a circle, each person inventing his own steps but obeying the earthy rhythm which kept them dancing all together, prancing and jumping in unison. Light faded out of the sky, dusk came down, but the Hunting People only laughed and

wiped the grease from their hands, so as to get a good grip on the fresh piece of mammoth meat they must cut. What did night matter? There was still hunger in them, and also there was triumph and eagerness, all of which called for more eating.

"Wood, bring wood!" shouted Karakaa, and the fire was built high. Red flame leaped against the starlit heavens, shadows and ruddy light chased each other over the mangled carcass of the mammoth, knives attacked the meat in whatever place was handy. With the rising moon there came the howling of distant wolves; the creatures would smell out the feast and pad up to try for a share, but they would get nothing until the Hunting People chose to leave.

The feast continued, power and joy shining in the eyes of Karakaa and his warriors. Steadily the night swept on. The wolves came close and halted to stare enviously, and the Hunting People laughed at them, knowing what the wolves longed to do and could not. By this time the mammoth killers were beginning to feel stuffed, yet that did not mean that they were going to abandon the feast. Ho ho, not that! The thing to do was to lie down and nap a little, then wake up rested and eat again! Awal was already slumped on the ground, his mouth limply open and his manner seeming to say that he wished he had not eaten the last two or three

pieces of meat his knife had been so quick to cut loose from the mammoth. But no matter: a snatch of sleep and he would be up and ready for more, and Juk with him. Juk was still munching, Karakaa and others with him, while the rest of the tribe slept.

The night passed and dawn came, whereupon everyone save a few exhausted women and children rose and cut new slabs of meat. Off a short distance they saw a row of fierce-eyed wolves, and above their heads there were vultures circling and drifting in the sky. Wolves and vultures longing for mammoth meat, and the meat was only for the Hunting People, no others. Later on they would leave, but not yet, not until they had gorged themselves half sick.

"And not until we have put our weapons in order," said Big Foot. "If we are to return to the south against the Beast Herders—"

"We are returning," interrupted Goort. "Magic is with us now. We can destroy them."

Juk gazed at his companions. He had wondered how they would feel this morning, after the passing of yesterday's excitement. Apparently they felt the same as then: the tribe would run no farther into the hills, but go back to the south and give battle to their enemies. The Hunting People were calmer now, but they were equally resolute. They had slain the last mammoth, and that

had filled them with immense reservoirs of courage and confidence.

"The flint mine has given us masses of new flint," said Karakaa, smacking his lips over a particularly juicy piece of meat; "and we shall stay right here and work it up, and when our teeth itch we can give them mammoth meat to tear at. Let each man get his weapons in shape."

In leisurely fashion they set to work, each for himself, save that Juk took Awal's spearhead and re-chipped one side of it for him, and also touched up the point. A task like that called for delicate skill, and though Awal was clever as the average tribesman in handling flint he was too rough and impatient for fine work. Toward evening the warriors had repaired the damage done their weapons by so many weeks of skirmishing with the Beast Herders; then Juk said something which had been a long time in his mind.

"Hearken," he said to Karakaa; "we shall attack our enemies, but how are we to reach them?"

"With our spears, of course!" laughed the chief.

"The Beast Herders have arrows," Juk reminded him. "The arrows are small and short, yet they reached farther than spears. It has always been that we failed to reach our enemies with spears, while they did reach us with arrows. Therefore I say we should make bows and arrows, and fight with those."

The men of the tribe began to murmur, and they frowned; for this was a new idea, and new ideas they did not like. Old ways were more familiar, and hence most people thought them also better. "We are people of the spear," said Goort harshly; "and by the spear we live or die."

"Die, perhaps," said Juk in a significant tone. "Why not try the bow and arrow? If we do, we shall have a better chance."

"It takes skill to do with the bow and arrow as the Beast Herders do," answered Karakaa. "We have no time to learn the art, and for my part I have no wish to learn it. Let everyone do as he likes, seeing that if he makes a mistake in battle he himself sinks down to pay for it, and no one else. I shall make throwing stones; you others will make the thing you think best."

The Flint Chipper shrugged and turned away, but though Awal thought him quelled he was as intent as ever upon the bow and arrow as a weapon. Not for the others, since they did not wish it, but for his own use. Juk took flints from his pouch and began to study and work with them, testing various pieces, and little by little flaking a handful of fragments into the semblance of rough arrowheads.

"Later I shall finish them," he said to Awal; "now I must get ash wood for arrows, and yew for a bow."

"I will go with you," murmured Awal, and when they were out of earshot of the tribe he said further: "Perhaps you would finish some arrows for me, too."

"What!" cried the Flint Chipper. "You will use them if I do? I will make you a few, and together we shall make bows of yew wood and string them with sinew out of our pouches. That reindeer sinew we have saved so long, that will be just the thing."

Juk was happy. They cut the wood they needed and went back to camp, heaving a rock at a snarling wolf on the way. The wolves stayed near, watching the carcass of the mammoth and waiting for the Hunting People to leave. When would they leave? No one spoke of that. First there were the new weapons to make, and of course there was more meat to eat. There was no hurry.

The bows came out fairly well. The yew wood ought to have been seasoned, yet it made bows which could be used. Awal finished them, and Juk worked over the arrowheads. In another day's time their new weapons were ready to use.

And what had the rest of the tribesmen been doing all this while? They had been busy, not only with their meat eating but with a type of weapon which they felt to be much more valuable than the bow and arrow. What Juk had said about arrows outreaching spears had stuck in Karakaa's mind. The chief had no intention of

admitting that Juk was right; at the same time he saw a way of answering the argument of the young flint chipper. A whispered conference with the older men, and they had all begun to make throwing stones.

"We used to use such things years ago," declared Karakaa, gesturing for the women to bring the biggest pieces of flint they had. "We used them, and then we stopped it. I wonder why we gave up using throwing stones?"

"That does not matter," said Goort. "Such stones will help us strike the Beast Herders mighty blows from afar, and in that way kill them more surely than we could do with spears. Let us make as many as we can."

And thus while the boys labored over their bows and arrows, Karakaa and the older men chipped out throwing stones. It was simple work. You merely took a flattish piece of flint, as large around as your two open hands put edge to edge, or larger—it made no difference—and then you chipped it all around the edge, making it as thin and sharp as possible. The result was a jagged wavy edge all the way around, so that when the stone was thrown properly it whirled horizontally through the air and cut with whatever section of its circular blade it happened to strike with. The better specimens were to be thrown from the hand, the cruder ones Karakaa's warriors planned to hurl by means of a leathern thong

tied about them. It was an interesting weapon, the throwing stone, being an attempt to improve simple rock hurling for the sake of greater effectiveness at a distance. There was science in all this, although the Hunting People did not think of it that way; their concern was to slay as many of their enemies as possible and slay them with a minimum of danger to themselves.

"You had better make throwing stones!" Talker shouted at the boys. "Be warned!"

"Every man chews his own meat," retorted Juk. "We shall see which weapon is better."

"Tomorrow we start south," said Karakaa suddenly. "As soon as it is daylight we go. Our weapons are ready."

The warriors smiled and nodded. Mammoth meat had filled them with strength, and now they were longing to take revenge upon the Beast Herders. For the rest of the day they ate and talked, sometimes watching the vultures circling overhead; and when they did this the tribesmen spoke of their enemies, soon to be food for the vultures.

"I shall make sure we win and the Beast Herders go to the vultures," said Goort, as the sun was about to set. "Watch, but say no word, since this is magic."

No one spoke, not even a child. In Juk's time children learned very early when to be quiet. When the tribe was fleeing, or when there were enemies slinking near, even

infants in arms seemed to sense the necessity of absolute quiet. And similarly with ceremonies which were meant to be observed in silence. The children held their tongues, the women and men were likewise still. Goort had taken mammoth meat and was cutting it into four pieces. He took the pieces in his hand, rose to his feet, and tossed a bit of meat to the west, another bit to the north, a third to the east, and the last piece to the south. The vultures swooped down for the food, whereupon Goort cried out:

"Those who die in battle are eaten by vultures, but we feed the vultures this day and by so doing keep them from us. Divert them from us, though they come from all directions, west, north, east, and south. Vultures, let us be! Vultures, fasten upon our enemies in the fight to come! From four directions come, from four directions feed upon the ones we shall slay!"

The wizard finished his charm and the people began to murmur with satisfaction, saying how fine it was that they had Goort, and how they would be blind and stupid without him. A woman ran to the mammoth and reached through a hole in the carcass, seeking a titbit for the wizard. She tugged and slashed and finally got it loose, and Goort took it and ate.

Juk was troubled. It appeared to him that the approaching battle was going to end in the destruction of

a tribe, either the Hunting People or the Beast Herders, one of the two. Which would it be? So far, Ranta's friends had won every skirmish, but with all the powerful magic of the last few days it seemed certain that Karakaa and his men would gain the next victory. Furthermore, the impending fight would be no thrust-and-run affair; it would be deadly; the Hunting People would never retreat again, the mammoth magic was too strong in them.

"I fear Ranta will be killed," whispered Juk.

"What do you say?" asked Awal.

"Nothing," said Juk hurriedly. "I am going to lie down and sleep, so do not waken me by ramming a chunk of meat down my throat."

Awal laughed and called him a sleepy bear, but Awal, too, was a little weary of so much feasting. Soon he was lying beside the Flint Chipper, sighing and reflecting how good it was to have plenty of meat. It was true that the mammoth had an odd smell, but that was only the effect of sun and passing time. What difference did it make! Meat was meat, and nothing could change that all-important fact. With a sleepy grin Awal closed his eyes, and knew no more until the howling of wolves awakened him shortly after dawn.

He jumped up. Juk was already at work upon his bow, a piece of forgotten meat on the ground beside

him. The tribe was astir, the women building up the fire which had burned so long at the mammoth's side, the men cutting slabs of meat. Awal clambered up onto the beast, pleasantly aware of the warmth of the carcass, and bent on getting a choice bit of meat from the loin. With his knife he jabbed and tore at the thick hide, made a slit in it and cut loose the meat he wanted, and slid back down to the ground.

"Do you want to try your bow and arrow?" asked Juk. "It is ready for you."

"I will try it on the trail," said Awal, and turned to the chief: "Are we going now?"

"You will go when we oldsters go," grunted Talker. The ancient one could never believe that Awal and Juk were big and strong as men; he remembered how young they were in contrast with himself, and as a consequence he wanted them to act like children, silent children with no confidence in their own powers.

Karakaa and Goort had put heads together, and now the chief made an announcement:

"Let every man thrust his spear deep into the mammoth, so that blood will stain it. This blood will give our spears strength when we fight. So says Goort."

Juk put down his bow and reddened his spear with the others, then he also thrust his arrows into the mammoth. The tribe was about to leave. It was almost time

for the wolves and vultures to rush upon the remnants of the kill, fighting for what the Hunting People were abandoning. Then Awal gave a cry of surprise.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

Out beyond the wolves there were people, hidden in the brush and yet visible from where Karakaa's tribe had camped. For a flashing instant Juk and Awal thought it must be the Beast Herders, but it was not. The newcomers were hill dwellers, squat heavy-jawed little men that the Hunting People had always held in contempt, and yet had also feared, because of their tricky ways. The hill dwellers kept their distance by day, but at night they had a habit of slipping into your camp and killing the ones who slept and thought to wake to another dawn. It was these people that lived by hunting reindeer, digging pits for the creatures to fall into, and then killing them with a multitude of puny little arrows, shot from crooked little bows. Karakaa laughed:

"Ho ho, our jackal friends are prowling about! They have seen our fire and want mammoth meat!"

Talker cackled and shouted at the men lurking in the brush: "Are there no more reindeer for you to hunt?"

"Or perhaps your arrows can no longer penetrate reindeer hide!" added Goort the wizard.

The hill people made no answer, but when Karakaa sprang a few steps forward and made a feint of throw-

ing his spear they darted back in fear. At that the mammoth-slayers burst into laughter, and Big Foot roared at them:

"Why not shoot *us* with your arrows, you jackals! Ho, it is because they are only for birds, or perhaps for a reindeer fawn held fast in a pit. Ho ho ho ho!"

Still there was no answer, and presently the Hunting People wearied of the sport. It was no pleasure to taunt those who would not respond, and accordingly Karakaa gave the signal to go. Juk looked at Awal in surprise; Awal had thrown down his bow and arrows, anger and shame in his face.

"What is the matter?" said Juk.

"The matter is that the wretched hill dwellers yonder have bows and arrows," retorted Awal. "I am not like them. I will have nothing to do with their kind of weapons, lest the older men ridicule me."

"We are already ridiculing you," chuckled Talker, starting off with his spear and throwing stones. "You, Awal, and especially Juk, because it was Juk that suggested such weapons."

Awal flushed and strode on, but Juk picked up the arrows his friend had thrown away, tucking them into his belt with the ones he had made for himself. He slung his bow over his shoulder and caught up with Awal, saying nothing. There was nothing to say. If

Awal wanted to be laughed away from a thing which was sound and valuable, let him; the Flint Chipper meant to keep his bow and arrows.

"Gr-r-r!" said Karakaa all at once, and whirled round, snarling and brandishing his spear. He was wanting a last bit of fun with the hill dwellers, and he had it. The wretches had been slinking toward the mammoth, eager to get there before the wolves and vultures could start tearing at the meat, but at Karakaa's unexpected threat they squealed like mice and ran back into the brush. The Hunting People guffawed and made gestures of contempt, then they resumed their way. This time they did not come back, but left the remains of the last mammoth to those who could seize and hold it, while they themselves went south.

All day they traveled, the women uneasy at the thought of the battle to come, but the men confident. Juk knocked over a pheasant and used the shorter tail feathers to tip the notched end of his arrows. The meat he divided with Awal that night, then as the tribe squatted about the fire Juk took pitch from a tree and made it serve as glue at the juncture of stone arrowhead and wooden shaft. He smeared pitch on each arrow and bound the heads tightly with sinew, paying no attention to the scoffing of the older men.

"You are a fool," said Awal angrily.

"Why am I?" asked Juk, with a calm face.

"Because you do silly things, and yet when people jeer at you there is no change in you. That is why you are a fool."

Then Juk flared up. He was most times an even-tempered youth, but who can be that way always and forever!

"It is you that is the fool," he retorted. "You cast away a weapon that might save your life, which shows your head is an empty gourd, holding only a few rattling seeds and no wit."

Awal sprang up to settle it with blows, but Karakaa upset him with a back-handed slap, scowling:

"No fighting, you wild dogs! Save your thudding for the Beast Herders."

Juk turned away, hot-hearted and trembling. He felt that Awal had done him evil, and Awal felt the same way about Juk. That night the boys slept apart for the first time in many years, and the next day they glowered at each other, ready to quarrel again. The tribe went on to the south, Juk occasionally testing his skill with the bow and arrow, and Awal making fun.

"You shoot well," he said to Juk. "By tomorrow sunrising you will be as clever as Ranta, the one who is going to flee like a hare when he sees me."

"He will not flee from you," declared Juk.

AWAL CLIMBED A TREE AND SPIED AHEAD.

"No, because he will have my spear in him," was the retort. "I am going to kill that Ranta and take his dog."

"You may take his dog," said Juk, "but you will never slay him. He is too much for you."

It was Awal's turn to lose his temper. He had never liked Ranta, and he suspected that Juk did. A flame of jealousy sprang up in Awal, his tongue so busy with slurs against Ranta that Juk was furious, though he would not show it. Instead of retorting, therefore, the Flint Chipper went forward and walked with Big Foot, ignoring Awal as much as possible.

"Close your mouth!" Karakaa called back to Awal. "You yap like a young fox that has killed its first quail."

"My quail is waiting for me," answered Awal, and Juk knew that he meant Ranta.

Karakaa halted and turned round, and at once Awal was afraid. It looked to him as if he were going to get a cuffing from the chief. But that was not it.

"I have been smelling smoke," said Karakaa. "The wind is from the south, and it may be that it is bringing the smell from a camp of the Beast Herders. Awal, climb a tree and spy ahead. The rest of us will go on."

Awal dropped back, and the tribe trudged around a bend in the trail and out of sight. Later Awal overtook them, reporting that he had seen nothing. The women

were pleased with the news, but Karakaa was still suspicious. That afternoon they found the split footprint of a wild cow, and beside it the track of a man.

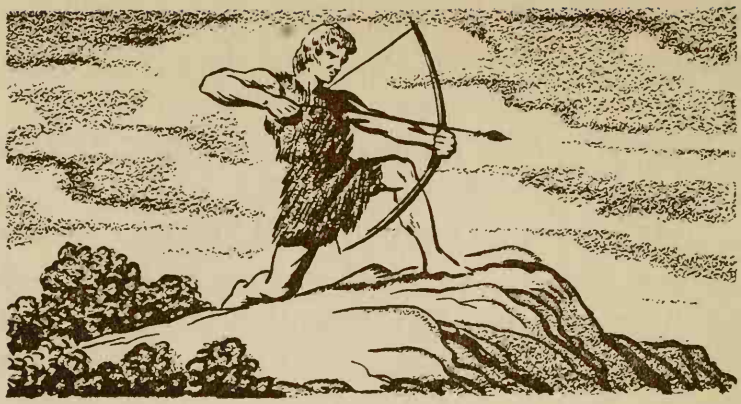
"Probably a Beast Herder," said Big Foot. "There is a party of our enemies hereabouts."

"All the worse for them," declared Karakaa. "If they are close at hand, instead of in camp near the pond which was ours until they came, then they will die all the sooner. Let us advance, and let the Beast Herders beware! We have slain the last mammoth, and now we shall slay these miserable two-foots."

The chief led them on. That night they camped near a reed-choked stream, and Awal was willing to be friends but Juk would not. The Flint Chipper could not forget his friend's sharp words, especially the boastful things that Awal had said against Ranta. Before another night it was likely that Ranta would be fighting with the Beast Herders, all the Hunting People his foes, and Awal determined to slay him.

"Awal I will not speak to," Juk told himself, and lay down alone, as he had done the previous night.

It was a pity, for these two boys had been friends a long time, and on the morrow death was to part them forever. . . .



CHAPTER XVI

Death of a Tribe

"NO gabbling!" whispered Karakaa. "Get up, everyone. Make ready."

Juk bounded to his feet. It was morning, gray and misty and cool, but nevertheless morning. The chief of the Hunting People was awakening his men, and also he was warning the women to keep quiet. He stood at the edge of the camp, squinting to the south, his head turned to one side and his mouth open, in the way that seems necessary to hearing well. Awal came up, pretending not to see the Flint Chipper.

"What is it?" asked Awal.

"I think there are enemies near," replied the chief. "Big Foot!"

"I am here," said Big Foot.

"You are clever at hearing along the ground," said Karakaa. "Try and catch sound."

Quickly Big Foot lay down flat, an ear cupped to the earth. The tribesmen stood still, in order that there be no vibrations to disturb Big Foot. For a long time the listening one did not stir, did not speak, then he rose to his feet.

"I cannot be sure," he said. "It may be the Beast Herders breaking camp, but perhaps not. We must go on a little farther and try again."

They ate hastily of the mammoth meat which the women had brought along, then the tribe fell in behind Karakaa and the chief started on. Juk coughed a little, whereupon Talker struck him in the ribs with an elbow.

"Stop coughing," hissed the old man.

"It came out of me in spite of myself," muttered the boy.

Awal let out a snort of contempt. He had not spoken to Juk this morning, and apparently he did not intend to; but he was willing to jeer at the young flint chipper. Juk tightened his lips and nostrils, breathing as little as possible of the raw tickling air and resolving not to

cough again, no matter if he choked for it. The mist was gray and ghostly, but it was not quite so thick as it had been; in an hour it would drift upward and away, and after that it would be easier to keep from coughing.

"Halt," said Karakaa softly.

The tribe came to a stop, motionless and silent in the gently billowing mist. Karakaa made a sign to Big Foot, and Big Foot once more lay flat upon the ground. His companions prepared to wait, but he surprised them. Scarcely had Big Foot settled himself to listen for tell-tale vibrations along the surface of the earth than he leaped to his feet, whispering rapidly:

"People coming! It is certainly the Beast Herders, leaving camp and traveling this way!"

Karakaa threw a glance to either side of the trail. To the right there was knee-high grass, to the left an extensive thicket of hazel bushes.

"Into the thicket," he said. "Make no noise, but hide. The women and children toward the back, fighting men in front. We shall take them unawares and slay them every one, as they think to pass along the trail. Take care! No noise!"

As fast as they could, and still go quietly, the Hunting People slipped into the brush. The women cowered down at a safe distance from the trail, the smaller children in their arms, the larger ones squatting wide-eyed

beside them. Karakaa and his warriors took up a position well within the spear-throwing distance of the path where they expected their enemies to pass. The chief smiled with satisfaction. It was a good place. Fighting in the open is all right if you cannot escape it, but the better way is to lie in ambush and strike unexpectedly. That was how wild beasts did it, and that was how primitive men had learned to fight. Now let the Beast Herders come!

Karakaa's warriors were fairly well sheltered and at the same time they could see the trail. By crouching a little their heads were concealed by the leafy tops of the hazel bushes; by standing erect they would be able to see their enemies and hurl death at them. Awal and the older men put throwing stones beside them, and also got their spears clear of the brush; Juk kept his spear handy but gave first attention to his bow and arrows. The boys were only an arm-spread apart, yet they did not speak. Their chance had slipped by; from now on their common life was tense struggle, with no time to patch up quarrels.

Where were the Beast Herders? Big Foot had surely heard them, but they did not come.

"Quiet," signaled the chief, as a woman shifted her position. "They will come soon."

Yet they did not appear. There was no sound, no

sight of the Beast Herders. Juk and his companions peered into the mist, but though the pale filmy stuff had begun to twist and billow and drift upward, its going revealed nothing which could be called a moving figure, a human being, an enemy. Time dragged past. No Beast Herders came. Karakaa was about to accuse Big Foot of hearing when there had been nothing to hear, when suddenly there was a sound.

The Hunting People looked at one another, alert but puzzled. What was that sound? It had been muffled, a kind of throat noise kept vague by accident or artifice, there was no telling which. Had it issued from a four-foot, or from a man?

"It came from the right direction," breathed Karakaa. "Hark!"

The sound came again, and this time everyone recognized it as a cough. More than that, it was probably a human cough. Juk especially was sure of it, because he himself had tried to keep back a cough a while ago, and it was the same sort of sound. Could a deer have made it? Possibly, but there was more likelihood that it was a thing on two feet, armed with bow and arrow instead of antlers. A deer's throat is different from a man's, and the sounds they make are different.

Talker was gesturing, saying things by means of his hands and face.

"Something wrong," he said, in this silent way. "The cough was guarded, kept back. They come, but not freely. It is because they know we are here."

That was bad to hear. Also it was probably the truth. The Beast Herders were close at hand, yet they were not passing. They were going cautiously, which meant that they were stalking something. And what was that something? It would have pleased Karakaa's men to believe that their enemies were after deer, or wild boar, or the shaggy cattle which sometimes roamed this part of the world, but they could not believe this. Instinct told them that they themselves were the game the Beast Herders stalked!

"They heard us," gestured Karakaa; "heard us, as we heard them. Keep silent, and watch. They will try to slip up on us. Be on guard. They think to kill us, but we shall kill them."

Juk looked around. He met Awal's eyes and glanced another way. The Flint Chipper was studying the thicket, its extent, the things which bordered it. Off to the east it climbed a brief slope, and this slope ended in a ledge of rock. There was room at this ledge for a man or two to crouch and peep out, safe against enemy weapons. As the mist rose and rose, and the Hunting People waited and stared and listened, Juk murmured:

"Do you see that ledge, Karakaa? If they are slip-

ping up on us they will try to get above us. Some of us should get up there before they do."

"Too far," frowned the chief. "We could not throw spears from there, and have them do good."

"Arrows could fly from there," said Juk meaningly.

"Pah!" said Karakaa, but he was worried nevertheless. He looked uncertainly at the ledge, saying finally: "If you want to risk your worthless arrows, climb up there and hold the ledge."

The Flint Chipper grinned and nodded. He took his weapons, cast a triumphant glance at Awal, and crept back through the thicket. Cautiously he crawled up the slope, pausing every little while to listen. There was no sign of the Beast Herders, not even when he had gained the shelter of the ledge and was peeping out over the hazel thicket.

"Perhaps they have circled around and mean to attack from above this ledge," he thought. "If they do they will pass me first, and it may be that they will not all pass. I can strike them before they can see to strike me."

He took all his arrows and arranged them on the ledge beside him, the arrows on one side and his spear on the other. The bow he kept in his hand.

"Kill!" shouted Karakaa suddenly.

Juk got to his hands and knees, staring. The battle

had begun, the Beast Herders advancing upon the thicket from the west, the Hunting People hurling stones at them. Where had Ranta's friends come from? It seemed that they had slipped up with the hope of taking their enemies off guard, and Karakaa had seen them in time. Then they had shown themselves and had commenced to fight, letting fly with arrows and dodging the sharp-edged throwing stones which were hurtling their way.

"Ha!" cried Big Foot. "I flattened one man! See him squirm!"

The Hunting People fell to shouting and jeering, the Beast Herders seized the one who had fallen and dragged him back out of the way. There was a lull in the fighting.

"Perhaps they will try to run!" exclaimed Talker. "We shall lose them."

"Then let us pursue the wretches," said Awal. "Hurry, Karakaa, before they flee and cannot be found."

Karakaa hesitated. The result of their first clash with the Beast Herders had elated him, and though it was his nature to be cautious he was sorely tempted to do as Awal had said. Then as the chief wavered Juk called to him from the ledge at the eastern border of the thicket:

"Have sense down there! I can see them. They have

not fled; they are only preparing another attack. If you leave the brush it will be easier for their arrows to find you."

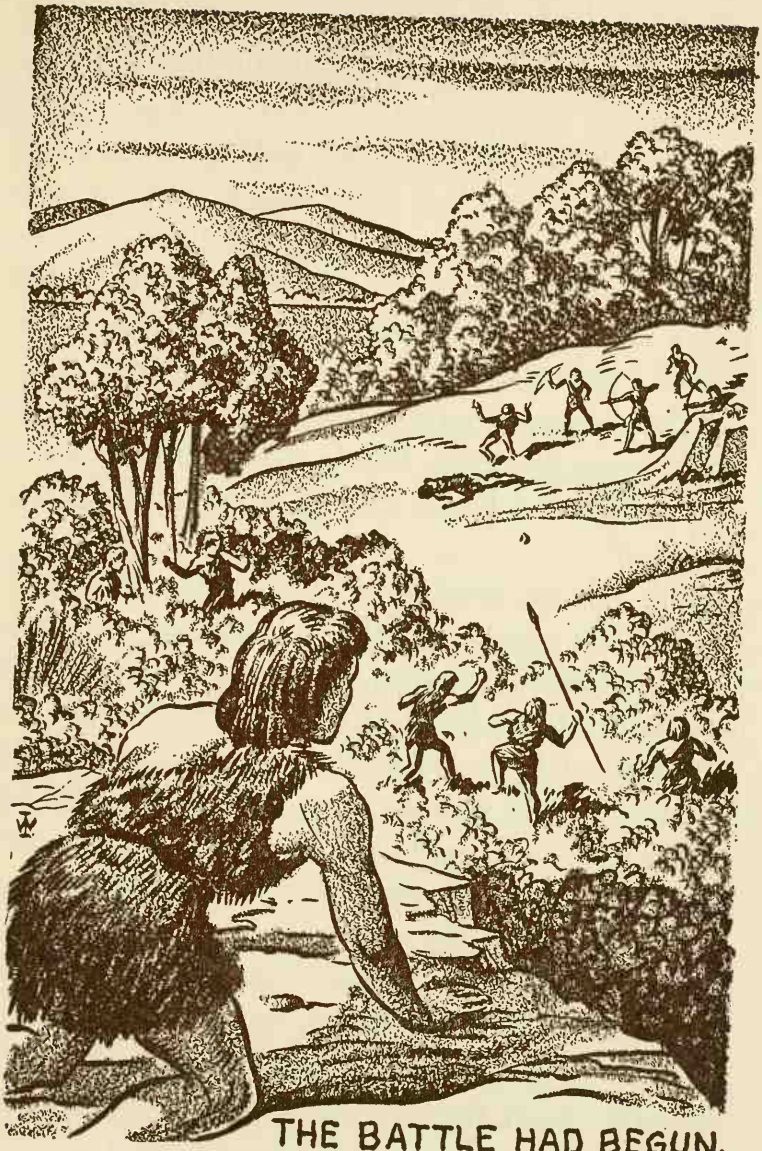
Awal turned and made an angry retort to Juk, but the chief hushed him. Caution had returned to the leader of the Hunting People.

"We stay here," he announced. "They are bound to die, because the strength of mammoths is in us; and since they are doomed we need not take chances. Ho ho, they are trying again!"

The Beast Herders were attacking, but warily. Instead of advancing in a body they had separated, each man stealing forward by himself. They kept hidden as much as possible, evidently planning to conserve their arrows and make each one count. Juk watched intently. He saw Ranta, and also the dog. Ranta had tied the brute to a tree, leaving it to struggle with a leathern cord which bound its jaws together. For a moment the bushes hid Ranta, then he appeared behind a juniper bush, bow and arrow ready.

"Shall I shoot him?" thought Juk. "I had better wait. I could not hit at this distance."

Awal did not see Ranta. There was too much brush between them, and too much excitement for either of them to think of personal feuds. Talker had more throwing stones than he could handle, and Awal had



THE BATTLE HAD BEGUN.

come to help him. The boy hurled a big one through the air, bringing a yell of pain from one of the Beast Herders.

"Ho ho, ho ho!" laughed Awal, and looked up at Juk. "That time I dented one. Fools shoot arrows and dogs howl!"

There was a grunt from Karakaa. An arrow had struck him in the hip. He seized his knife, slashed the wound a little wider, and jerked out the arrow.

"Their arrows are no worse than bee stings!" he cried. "Duck when they come, but do not fear them. Now I shall crack a few bones for that arrow someone shot into me!"

With this the chief seized a throwing stone which had a leathern cord attached to it. Swinging the missile round and round by means of the cord, he took aim as best he could and let go. The stone flew straight for a Beast Herder, one half-hidden in the grass. He tried to roll out of the way but there was no time. The big flint struck him heavily on the right shoulder, and when he sprang up and ran back out of range the Hunting People saw that Karakaa had broken a bone for him: his shoulder sagged limply, and since it was his right one he would pull no more bows in this present fight.

"Nor in any fight!" bellowed Karakaa. "We have wounded one of them to the death, and crippled an-

other! One by one we shall slay them all!"

Talker had let out a gasp. An arrow had grazed his ribs and he did not like that.

"Guard your tongue," he growled at Karakaa. "The demons of battle do not care for such boasting, because they themselves want to be the ones to decide a fight, and men who brag they let the others punish. Only it is the wrong ones who get punished, you escaping, I stopping an arrow."

"It did not wound you," retorted Karakaa. "Get another stone into the sling; or, better still, let Awal throw for you; he is stronger than you."

Awal hurled another stone, but it was Talker's last. Goort had a few more, but Big Foot did not. Shortly the last of the throwing stones had been used up, and the Hunting People had only their spears and hand weapons. Juk was beginning to worry. He had seen his companion put two of the Beast Herders out of the running, but from now on it was going to be different. It was as he had warned Karakaa: arrows could reach farther than spears, farther and more accurately. Ranta and his friends were advancing, flat on the ground and hunching forward, a snake's wriggle at a time, yet steadily drawing nearer for all that. The dog was leaping frantically, trying to get loose. No one paid any attention to the brute, until suddenly it snapped

the leathern cord and came leaping toward the thicket. Pausing an instant to claw off the thong which had bound its jaws together, the dog rushed forward, barking and snarling with the fierceness of a wolf.

The crucial point of the battle had arrived, though as yet no one realized it. Awal heard the dog and rose up to look, the dog saw him and rushed to attack. Instantly a daring plan came upon Awal; he meant to capture the dog! Open-mouthed the creature darted into the thicket, making straight for Awal.

"Ha!" said Awal, and with a sudden grab he had the brute by the throat. The dog yelped but Awal held it fast, squatting on it until he had put his spear through his belt and then getting up to carry the dog back through the thicket.

"You fool!" cried Karakaa. "Let it go. There is no time for butterfly play!"

"I will give the creature to the women to hold," said Awal, but Ranta saw him and let fly an arrow. The arrow missed, whereupon Awal called a taunt to Ranta and kept on with the dog. He got to the women but they were afraid of the creature, especially as by this time Ranta was circling around to the north of the thicket in the effort to free his dog.

Juk crouched on his ledge watching anxiously. Awal was stubbornly determined to keep the dog, Ranta was

set upon getting it back. The two boys were maneuvering at the edge of the thicket, Awal retreating, Ranta following and waiting for a chance to shoot. Thus far he had not dared, for Awal was holding the dog up in front of him as a shield.

Juk watched until they were almost out of sight; then he cried out, half in alarm, half in exasperation:

"Come back, Awal; you are out of your wits!"

Awal did not come back, and there was no time for Juk to look and see what was happening to him. The thing that Awal did had irritated Talker; the old man turned around to see if Awal were returning or not, and this exposed him. Before Talker knew what was happening to him an arrow had lodged in his throat. With a gurgle he sank to the ground, done for.

"Fight, and give no looks in Awal's direction!" cried Karakaa. "We shall attend to that cub later on, when this is over."

"Here they come, these Beast Herders!" shouted Big Foot. "Give them spears!"

The slaying of Talker had encouraged the ones who shot arrows. They crept nearer, grinning to find there were no more throwing stones and planning each shot. Goort lifted up to hurl his spear, but before he could come forward with it there were two arrows in him, one in his cheek and the other in his arm. He let out

a cry of rage, grinding his teeth at the Beast Herders, as he yelled:

"Magic is with us, and against you! We shall slay you all, all!"

Another arrow struck him, this time in the middle of the lower breast, at the point where the ribs join from left and right. He staggered, clutched at the brush, and fell.

"It was their witch doctor!" cried one of the Beast Herders. "Now they are defeated. We have won!"

Juk was shaking with fear. Had the mammoth magic failed? So it seemed. It must have been false or weak; at any rate, it was failing in the struggle against the Beast Herders. Another of the Hunting People went down; then Juk roused up. He must help his people. Not with his spear, because he was as certain as he was certain of flowers in springtime that spears would do no good. Arrows, arrows, he must fight with arrows! Rising to his knees, he put a feathered shaft to the bow string, took aim and let the arrow fly. It missed, but not too badly. A second arrow went nearer its mark, clipping the Beast Herder alongside the head and spoiling what he meant to do to Karakaa. The chief struck the man down, shouting at Juk:

"Arrows will help, if you can send them true! Shoot all you can. We are in trouble."

Trouble, indeed! Talker was dead, Goort was dead, Big Foot was wounded in more places than it was worth while to count. At the back of the thicket the women were screaming in terror, for they foresaw, in their pessimism, that this was the end of the world for them. One after another their men were sinking down, the grim enemy advancing steadily, and steadily taking their toll.

Juk put an arrow deep into the side of a certain warrior, but although this one was swaying to the ground, there were others, too many others. The boy got down from his ledge, running to get arrows that the Beast Herders had shot and left. They were better than his own, and in quick succession he pierced two more of the enemy. Then a man whirled and drew a bow at Juk, and Juk threw his spear, taking him by surprise and tumbling him over backward.

Karakaa suddenly moaned and tottered on his feet; he was badly hurt. With a gasp of despair Juk snatched up all the arrows he could find and darted back to the ledge; in the thicket it was hard to shoot accurately, from this vantage point there was a clear view.

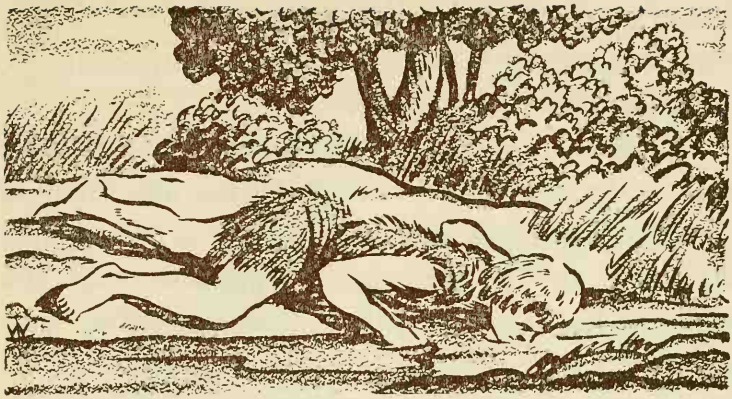
A clear view of many things. Juk could see where to shoot, but also he could see that his comrades were done for. He sent an arrow at a man who was rushing at Big Foot, but it missed, and the next instant Big

Foot was down, his skull cracked by a stone hatchet. In desperation Juk shot again and again, sometimes missing and sometimes scoring a hit, but it was no use. The Beast Herders did not even see him. They were intent upon the destruction of the tribe in the thicket. Slinging their bows onto their backs the victorious ones attacked with knives and stone hatchets, ending a life with each fierce blow.

Juk shot his last arrow and rose to his feet, spear in hand. His mother had died long ago, but there was among the women there in the brush a certain one who had been kind to him, giving him food when otherwise he would have had none, and defending him against men who were much older and stronger. A Beast Herder was rushing upon this woman, and Juk hurled his spear; the weapon saved the woman for a moment. A moment, but no longer: another warrior sprang forward, and she was slain.

"There is a bowman behind us, on the ledge!" shouted someone. "Bring him low with an arrow!"

Men whirled to shoot at Juk, but he did not stay to be killed. He had shot all his arrows, he had thrown his spear, and now there was nothing else to do, save flee. With a cry of mingled sorrow and rage, he scrambled up over the ledge, dodged an arrow, and fled into the woods.



CHAPTER XVII

The Great Loneliness

UP over the ledge and off through the woods ran the young flint chipper, and when he was winded he threw himself to the ground, eyes back the way he had come, ears listening for some sign of pursuit.

No one came chasing him; no Beast Herder, no one at all. Save for the pounding of his frantic heart there was stillness everywhere in the woods. Karakaa was dead, Big Foot and Goort and Talker and all the others of the tribe had been killed. Only Juk had escaped.

Suddenly the Flint Chipper remembered Awal, the

taking of the dog, and how Ranta had been stalking him. Juk sprang to his feet, calling tremulously:

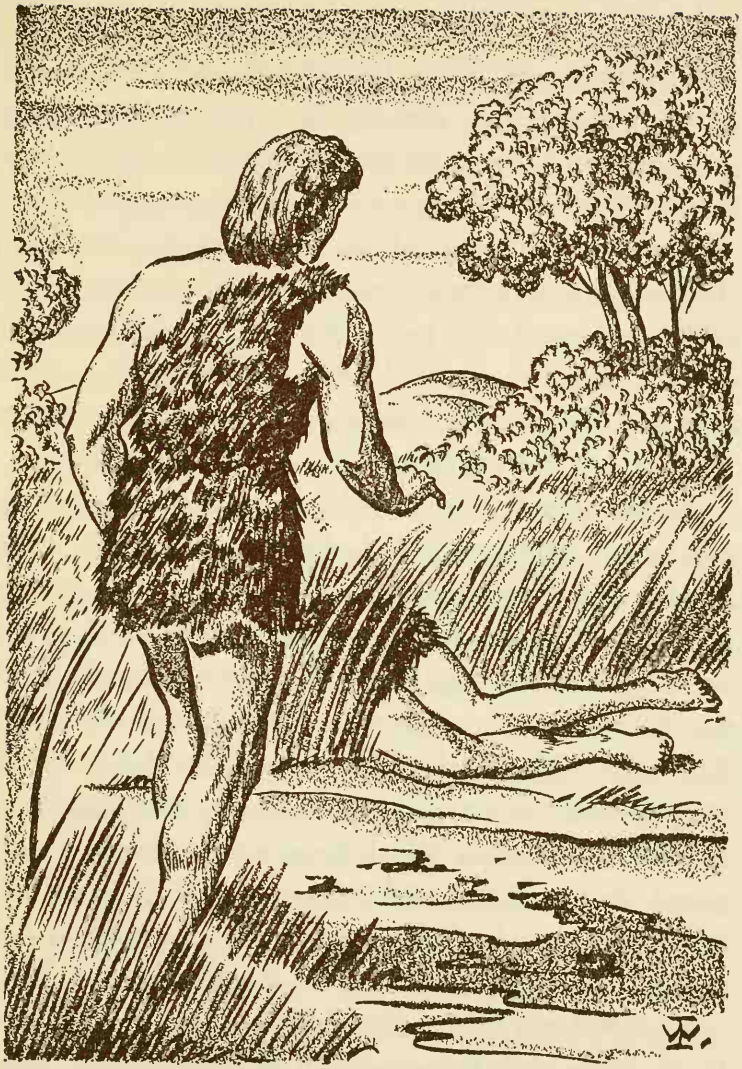
"Awal! Where are you, Awal?"

There was no answer, and that alarmed Juk. He must find his friend. Quickly he got his bearings, figuring out the direction he himself had taken in fleeing from the thicket, then calculating Awal's probable route. Juk began to reconnoiter, spying for tracks, sniffing for a possible scent of the dog, and listening for some signs of a fight between Awal and Ranta. In a little while he found Awal's footprints, but they led up over rocks and he soon lost them. Calling softly he kept up the search, puzzled to know why he heard nothing. The two who fought must certainly be close; Juk could not imagine Awal running from Ranta.

"Ugh!" grunted Juk all at once, and stopped.

He had found something. A clump of bushes stood in front of him, but beyond the bushes there was a dog. It lay upon the ground, and it was dead. Ranta's dog. And where was Ranta? Where was Awal? Juk crept around the bush, his skin swept by a cold chill. Half concealed by the grass there was the body of a youth, not moving. Dead, but who was it, Ranta or Awal? The Flint Chipper came forward, staring.

It was Awal. He lay on his back, three arrows in him. Ranta's arrows, no doubt. Juk was stupefied. Dully he



HALF CONCEALED BY THE GRASS
THERE WAS THE BODY OF A YOUTH.

turned and looked at the dog. Awal had slain the creature with his spear. Bit by bit Juk built the tale together. In this secluded spot the two boys had come together in fatal combat, enemies because they belonged to different tribes, and hating each other because of the dog. The position of Awal and the four-foot, their wounds, the footmarks dug deeply into the earth—all these things told Juk how it had been. Ranta had overtaken the one who thought to steal his pet a second time, and the boys had fought, Awal killing the dog to keep Ranta from taking it back, Ranta in turn slaying Awal.

All this passed through Juk's mind as he stood there, gaping and blinking at the bodies on the ground. Then slowly, like some dreadful monster in a dream, fear rose up in him. He had been friends with Awal, sleeping with him, hunting with him, quarreling and laughing with him, but that was Awal living, not dead! This inert thing in the grass, it was not Juk's friend, not any more; it was only a dead body, a lurking place for the horrid ghost which from now on was free to prowl the world, affrighting people who were still alive. Juk shrank back, nausea and a growing terror in him. And suddenly he whirled and fled.

The boy had run from the thicket where the Hunting People made their last stand, but this time he ran faster and longer and more desperately than before. Beast

Herders were something to flee from; Awal's ghost was much more dangerous a pursuer, if it chose to come. That was the only thing which gave Juk a morsel of comfort: perhaps the ghost was busy plaguing Ranta, and would therefore excuse Juk from its torments. At least for a while.

"I must rest," gasped the Flint Chipper, and at length came to a stop. "If I lose all my breath I shall be all the easier prey for whatever attacks me."

He sank down beside a bush. Small thorns pricked him; it was a wild blackberry bush, ripe berries within an arm's reach, thorns against his legs and arms. Juk paid no attention; he saw neither thorns nor berries. Things like that did not matter. All of a sudden the physical and tangible world was unreal; the only substantial things were demons and ghosts, spirits and magical charms, invisible horrors in general. So long as Juk belonged to a tribe of people, enjoying the daily companionships of his kind, he had been able to ignore these invisible horrors. Not all of them, and not all the time, but for the most part. It was like having a fire at night: you kept your eyes on the fire and it comforted you and kept you from seeing much of the fearful night beyond the red blaze. Juk's tribesmen had similarly kept him from too close a view of things like ghosts, but now the tribe was gone; Juk was alone, and

there was nothing to stand between him and the rabble of imaginary horrors which our early ancestors considered so real.

What was that? It seemed to Juk that he had heard a sound, and yet when he worked back in his memory he knew there had been none. No sound, yet something had changed. Probably there had been a noise and it had stopped, and the change from sound to silence had attracted his attention. That often happened. Juk searched still further in his mind, and knew that a cricket had been chirping, and had stopped.

There was meaning in that, or at least there could be. When you are in the woods, and birds or insects leave off with their customary noise, it is often because something has interrupted them. Enemies slinking up, for instance. . . .

Juk felt himself surge a little closer to the things of this world. He realized with a start that he was unarmed. There were wild beasts in the woods, and there were also hostile two-foots, yet he had only a flint knife and two stone hatchets. That was not enough; he must have a spear. The Flint Chipper had thrown his at a Beast Herder, and had fled from the lost battle in the thicket without recovering it.

"I must get it," he muttered. "I must have my spear."

He rose and started slowly off in the direction of Karakaa's last fight. Slowly, because it was a dangerous mission. In trying to get his spear he might run afoul of some of the Beast Herders and instead of a spear get an arrow—in his throat. If they were still there. And they might be. Perhaps Ranta's people had lingered to gloat over the ones they had slain, or it was possible that they had made camp near by to kill game for a celebrating feast.

Very carefully the Flint Chipper came nearer. Presently he could see the thicket, the tangle of hazel bushes where his people had planned to hide and destroy their enemies. The tops of the bushes swayed a little in the summer breeze, gently and serenely, as though men had never met death in this peaceful place. Of the Beast Herders there was no sign. No one showed, no one made a sound. Juk listened and heard nothing, and accordingly he got down on all fours and crept forward, tensely ready to flee at the slightest hint of danger. He reached the edge of the thicket.

One long look and he saw how it was. The Beast Herders had gone away, Karakaa's people had stayed behind. The chief lay dead, all his tribe with him, save for the staring Flint Chipper. Every man had been slain, every woman and child had been killed. Juk let his eyes rove over them, wanting to make sure. He longed

to discover that some of his companions had escaped the slaughter; he would have been content if only one were alive to keep him company; but they were all dead. Shivering a little, he stepped around the body of Goort the wizard and came to his spear. It was lying on the ground, the shaft lying across the shrunken breast of old Talker, the ancient one who had followed the last mammoth into the fog of another world, no more to wander in this one.

Juk took up his spear and went hastily away.

And what did he do then? He could not have said. Something resembling a sick dream descended upon him, as rain clouds settle upon a hilltop and veil all that goes on there. With this spear in his hands he wandered into the woods, stumbling occasionally because of the daze in his eyes, and often blundering into places where there was no passing. Once he felt something clutch him; he jerked around with startled eyes and saw that it was only a bramble, wrapping around the calf of his leg. Brusquely he pulled away, scratching his leg until it bled, but not noticing it. He went on.

That night he crouched under a fir tree, numb with fear and despair. He stayed there until dawn, and then he crawled out of his hiding place and wandered on his way.

Shortly after sunrise he was alarmed to see tracks

in the soft damp ground. Human tracks! Juk bent down, his head swimming from dizziness. After a long while of pondering he recognized the footprints. The Hunting People had made them. This was their trail to the south; they had passed here on their way from the mammoth camp to the thicket where death had overtaken them.

In alarm Juk sprang away from the tracks. He had remembered that all his people were dead, and that therefore everything about them was dangerous. The ghosts of dead men often followed back upon the trail of the living, wanting to find them and plague them.

"I did well not to touch those tracks," muttered the young flint chipper. "If I had done that, my trail and the trail of the dead would have been connected, and evil could have come to me."

He glanced back at the path, seeking Awal's footprints. They were there. Juk knew them as well as he knew his own.

"Awal is dead," he whispered, and hastened out of sight.

Without warning he came face to face with a roe deer. The creature had been feeding, and Juk had surprised it. The deer jerked up but did not flee. That was strange. Why had it merely leaped to one side and stopped, to turn and look at him in the dumb and

mildly impertinent way that deer have? Juk stood stock still, not moving. In his woe and bewilderment it seemed to him that perhaps he, too, was dead, a ghost that the deer did not mind, did not think it necessary to flee from. Shudders of horror went over the boy. He struggled against the notion. No, he must not be dead, he must keep on living, even though there was nothing but wretchedness ahead of him. Juk was no ghost; he was alive and he would prove it by killing the deer.

Awkwardly he lifted his spear, took aim and threw. The weapon missed, the deer blew out its nostrils and turned and trotted into the woods.

"I missed," said Juk hoarsely. "Why did I miss? There is something wrong."

There was something wrong, but not what he imagined. He had not eaten since yesterday, and he had been benumbed by all that happened since then, his wits clouded and his nerves shattered. Do you think primitive people were stolid and incapable of being emotionally upset? On the contrary, there were stone-age men who must have been as imaginative and unstable as any modern race. Juk was no clod; he was a sensitive youth, living under the almost intolerable weight of the superstition and ignorance of his time. So he put a wrong interpretation upon his failure to kill the deer.

"The spear was like a dead thing," he muttered. "How was that? Always before it had power and went fairly true, this time it wavered like the grass stalks we used to throw as children. Death has contaminated my spear. Ha, it was Talker!"

He walked up to the spear and looked at it, his lips writhing in distaste. When Juk went to retrieve his weapon in the thicket, the shaft had been lying across Talker's breast. That had infected it with death, and also with weakness, because of the age and flabby muscles of Talker at the time of his death. The spear would be worthless unless it was properly cleansed.

"I will scrape it," said Juk, and he sat down beside the spear. Out of his pouch he took a small curved flint, of the sort that the Hunting People used to cut sinews and to cut fat from the inside of animal hides. With this flint he began to scrape the shaft of his spear, not only where it had touched Talker, but all up and down the ash handle. For as everyone knows—everyone familiar with the rules of magic and demonology—evil can slide, crawl, run and creep, and nothing pleases evil more than to turn up where you least expect it.

As soon as the spear shaft had been scraped free of contamination, Juk washed his hands in a stream. The washing was to rid himself of any evil which might have got onto his hands; and to make the cleansing all

the more certain he took pungent leaves, crushed them, and rubbed the juice to and fro in his palms. There are particular plants which various wild beasts dislike, and from this fact Juk reasoned that demons had similar prejudices. The plant he had chosen to rub on his hands was a vile-smelling thing, and accordingly the boy was sure that it would rid him of the last traces of evil.

Juk felt better after that, indeed he felt clear enough in his mind to know that he was faint with hunger. He must eat. The tongue in his mouth was swollen and dry, his throat hurt when he swallowed. Gazing around to make sure that no one was creeping up on him, the boy lay down at the edge of the stream and drank; then he rose and gathered berries and some half-ripe nuts, and these he ate. After that he felt better.

Better in body, but not in mind. He was lonely. It was so odd not to have Awal to talk to. Many times in his life Juk had been hunting by himself, but it had never fretted him. Because always there was the knowledge that he had people, a tribe that was out of sight but not far off, friends and comrades who were waiting for him at a cave, or at an open-air camp, or some rendezvous such as a stream crossing or a certain meadow.

Thus it had always been, and now it had stopped being that way. Juk was alone. Other creatures had companions—birds, softly-padding foxes, even the crawling

bugs at his feet—but there was no one to keep Juk from the miseries of solitude. No one cared about him any more. It was an indifferent world, a mocking world. The sun shone brightly, insects chirped, sparrows sang, bees hummed past in search of sweet-smelling flowers. Everything went on as before, save that Juk had been robbed of the human companionship he must have, been robbed of the human companionship he could not live without.

One man is no man! That is a proverb which was to be coined long ages after the time of Juk, but Juk would have admitted its truth. He was, like all human beings, a social animal; so long as he was a member of a tribe he glowed with satisfaction, brisk plans, the urge to do things; alone, he drooped, humanness leaking out of him like raindrops out of a sagging leaf. A man who lives with others of his kind is truly a human being; by himself he eventually becomes queer, unnatural, no longer normal. *One man is no man!*

"I did wrong," he told himself. "I am the cause of Awal's death. We were friends and we quarreled. There was nothing to quarrel about, yet we did it, and the demons brought disaster to Awal, thinking thus to punish me, as they have. Why should the dog have got loose, and why should Awal have tried to steal it again, when we were fighting hard and there was no time for

butterfly play, as Talker or somebody told him? It was queer that Awal should do such a thing! Demons put him up to it, and also they set Ranta upon his trail, ending Awal's life and leaving me alone. We should not have quarreled, Awal and I. Ever since I can remember—yes, and even before that—we were friends. It is bad not to have a friend, to be alone like this."

He paused, gulping noisily for a moment. Slowly his eyes moved upon the woods, as though he were seeking something. Then he said in a whisper:

"If Awal were alive I would speak to him before he spoke to me, and if he wanted to believe that I was to blame for our quarrel, he could believe that. I would not mind. I would be content to have Awal with me again."

Again he paused, his breath coming hard. A strange plan was forming in his mind. His friend was dead, but perhaps he was not really dead; or if he were, then perhaps he could be brought back to life. Magic was a wonderful thing, even though Goort had made many mistakes in his time. Suppose that Juk made some kind of sacrifice, and this enabled Awal to come back onto his feet and join his friend!

"If I could do that, and he would come—" whispered Juk, then he shivered. No, that was folly, to think such things. Awal was really dead, and if Juk succeeded in

drawing anything to himself by means of a sacrifice it would likely be, not Awal in the flesh, but Awal's ghost. "And the ghost may come, anyway," muttered the young flint chipper. "I have tempted it by thinking about it. I must stop that. I will put Awal out of my mind, lest evil come of it."

Ah, but could he do that? Juk and Awal had been close friends, living together as two fingers live upon the same hand. It was hard for Juk to believe that Awal was gone, and doubly hard to keep from thinking of him. If there were other people to think about, others to talk to and laugh with, then it would be different; but as things were, it was going to be hard. The Flint Chipper was aware that a cold sweat had broken out on him. Awal was plaguing him! Memories of their childhood together, words that Awal had said, things Awal had done, all this was crowding in upon Juk, swelling like a cloud which begins as a mere wisp of white and in no time at all is a towering mass, crushing the breath out of you to think of being under it, and all the while growing and expanding and becoming worse instead of better.

"I must do something," gasped the Flint Chipper, struggling to his feet. "This way I shall die. A single day is longer than the time between spring and autumn, and when I had Awal with me there was between sun-

rise and dusk no more than the time of a bird's wing flapping. I must find people to live with."

Instantly he felt better. People to live with! That was what he needed. Karakaa's tribe had perished, but there were others in the world. Juk must find a new tribe. It would be dangerous, for they would at first look upon him as an enemy fit only to thrust full of spears or arrows, until he resembled a hedgehog; yet he must prevent that, dodging death and somehow making friends with them, until they were willing to take him in as one of them.

Where would he find such a tribe? There were reindeer hunters in the back hills, but he despised them; and besides, they were a treacherous people, bound to slay him as soon as they had him in their grasp. The Yellers, what of them? They lived south of here, in the valley which lay to the west of the valley which Karakaa had once claimed as his. No. Not the Yellers. Memory of their long feud with Juk's people would stir in the Yellers, and sooner or later it would lead to trouble. Someone else, some new tribe, that was what Juk needed; and in his eagerness he took his spear and set out to the west, seeking traces of people with whom he might make friends.

That night he saw a fire, and had comfort in squatting within sight of it and watching it far into the night.

Fire meant people, and on the next day he came stealing nearer, wanting to know who and what they were.

They were Beast Herders.

The discovery was a profound shock to the boy. The Beast Herders were his death enemies, and they would certainly respond to his advances by turning on him and slaying him. They were a revengeful, fierce-hearted people, else they would never have kept after Karakaa's tribe with such terrible persistence. It was wrong to be so hard. People should sometimes be soft and agreeable. Now, for example.

He trailed the Beast Herders, wanting to see what they were up to, and getting a measure of comfort from the mere sight of human beings. They were tracking wild cattle, and in the afternoon they killed a cow and took the bawling calf a prisoner, though they could never have caught it if they had not wounded it with arrows.

Juk watched from afar, surprised to see that the Beast Herders meant to take the calf home alive. Someone that might have been Ranta cut a stout ash sapling, the calf's legs were tied together, the pole was thrust between them. Two men took up the front end of the pole, two men took up the hind end. The hunters set off to the south, carrying the calf with them.

Juk hurried to a spot where he could see better. He got behind a boulder and waited, his lips dry with ex-

citement. In a little while the procession came in sight. A strong, well-built warrior led it; he was clearly the chief of the tribe, and to Juk's astonishment he wore a necklace of bear's claws exactly like Karakaa's. No, that was not it—it was the same necklace. The Beast Herder had taken it from Karakaa and was wearing it in his stead.

The Beast Herders were coming opposite where Juk lay watching them. He saw the calf, blood dripping from its neck. Also he saw Ranta, a spear wound on his shoulder. Probably Awal had wounded him there. Juk fastened his eyes upon the boy who had slain his friend, noting his rugged but open countenance, the half-smile on his lips, his free and easy manner of walking. Ranta carried a bow and many arrows, and there was a handsome bracelet of small shells about one wrist.

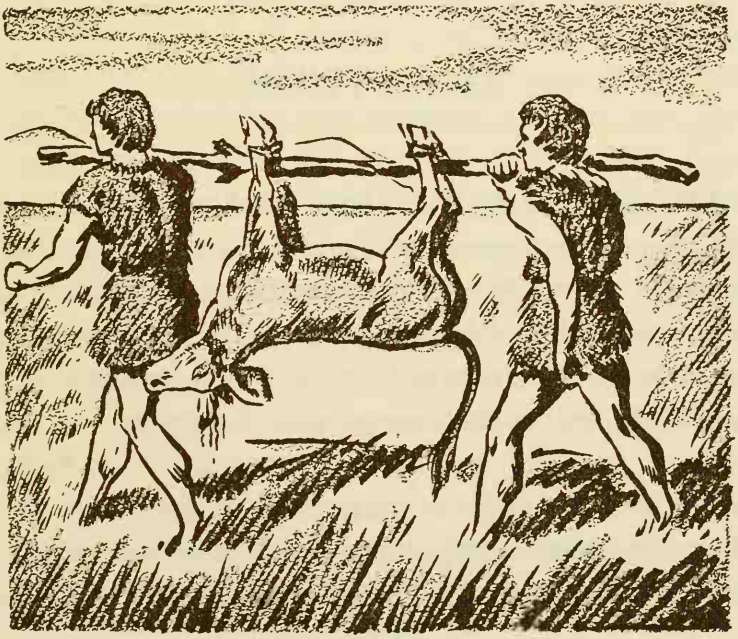
The young flint chipper wet his lips, uncertain and troubled. He did not understand the strange feeling which had taken possession of him. Scarcely a spear's throw away there strode the youth who had killed Juk's best friend, and yet somehow Juk was not angry. Juk had no desire to hurl his spear at Ranta, wanting to slay him. It was a horrible and a pitiful thing that Awal was gone, but since he was, it would not help to kill Ranta.

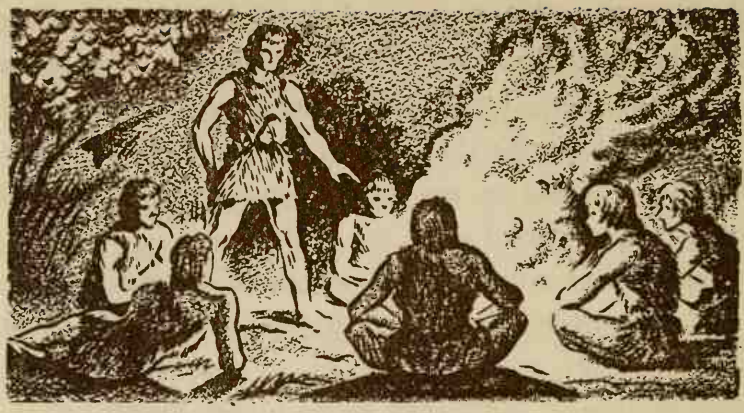
It was queer that Juk should feel that way, and

doubly queer that Ranta and Awal should be flowing together in the mind of the Flint Chipper. Awal gone and Ranta here, Awal fading and Ranta brightening! Juk trembled with the press of his emotions. He rose a little, wanting to see better, for the Beast Herders were passing out of sight.

Then all of a sudden he knew what he must do.

"I must make friends with Ranta's people," he whispered. "They must take me in, so that Ranta and I may be friends and I shall be no longer lonely."





CHAPTER XVIII

Foes or Friends

JUK followed the Beast Herders, taking pains to keep from being seen, yet likewise careful not to lose sight of them. Not even when they trailed down to the pond did he take his eyes from them; hereabouts there were no big trees to hide him, but there was plenty of brush, and he made use of this. Lying flat as a fox after a partridge, Juk crawled forward, not stopping until he had a clear view of the camp and could also hear something of what the different ones were saying.

The horses were the chief concern of the Beast Herd-

ers who had been away for war, and now were home again. Dumping their calf onto the ground beside the pit-houses, the warriors demanded to know how the horses had fared.

"Well," said a creaky old man, and he gestured toward the herd a little farther down the pond; "no beasts came to attack them, and there were no Hunting People to stampede them, slaying the new lead mare, and such things."

"And there will never be any trouble from those Hunting People," laughed a warrior. "We have destroyed the tribe."

Whereupon there were grins of pleasure, and shouts, and afterward many questions as to how it had happened. The fighting men answered a few of these questions, but not many. They were weary and hungry, and there was meat in the fire. Juk watched from his hiding place, wondering what kind of meat it was, and at length identifying it as bird-deer. That was the name his own people gave the creature, because it was small and exceedingly swift, too fast a runner for spears to bother it much, but apparently an easy prey to the darting arrows of the Beast Herders.

"They are clever," murmured Juk, watching from afar. "Pit-houses and ground stone tools and arrows and horse herds—they understand all such new marvels.

I want to be with these people, living with them as I once lived with Karakaa's tribe."

A shout echoed from the camp by the pond. It was getting along toward evening, and the women were piling the fire high with fuel dragged up from the woods. Frogs were croaking in the pond, pale flowers were beginning to glimmer in the twilight. There was magic color in the heavens, so soft and so gently shifting from one hue to another that the whole pageant seemed unreal, a kind of imagined thing and nothing more. Once more the shout came, and this time Ranta got up from beside the fire and went off toward the horses.

"Is he to herd them tonight?" wondered the Flint Chipper. "Perhaps I could slip around and talk to him, if he is to do that."

Ranta was not herding tonight. An old man and a child were in charge of the herd, and now they were trying to drive the horses nearer camp, for greater safety between dusk and dawn. The new lead mare had been giving them trouble, and accordingly the old man had called upon Ranta to help. Together they drove the beasts to a spot between the pit-houses and the pond, where the herd customarily spent the night. Then Ranta returned to the fire, and everyone fell upon the bird-deer, cutting meat and chewing it down, while Juk licked his lips and watched them.

Suddenly the talk at the fire turned to the Hunting People.

"Ha, Wurklu, so you destroyed them, eh!" exclaimed an old man.

"I did," said a certain warrior. "My fighting men giving me aid and doing my bidding, we slew the whole tribe."

Juk craned to see who it was that said this. He could not put voice and man together at this distance, but there were gestures to show him. The warrior called Wurklu was seated in the middle of the deer eaters, and the firelight shone upon a familiar necklace he wore. It was Karakaa's bear-claw necklace. Wurklu was the chief of the Beast Herders.

"You slew them," nodded the old man; "but was there no booty?"

"Booty?" said Wurklu.

"Yes. Every kind of game yields something: birds and beasts give meat, a flint ridge gives stone for weapons, people give what they have. What is that circlet of bear claws you wear?"

"The circlet of bear claws is, I believe, a circlet of bear claws," laughed Wurklu, then he grew serious. "No, they had nothing to yield. They were crude hunters, wandering roofless as jackals. Only their spears were good, and we had no need of those."

"Well-made spears, some of them had," said another warrior. "Chipped with great skill. Better than ours they were."

Off in the darkness behind his sheltering rock Juk felt a glow pass over him. The best spears among the Hunting People had come from his own hand, because only Juk had loved flint chipping with such passion and persistence that he was able to learn to do it well. He listened eagerly for more such talk, but there was none. The conversation had turned to another thing.

"We slew them all, and they will never trouble our horse herd again," Wurklu was saying.

"Not all," objected Ranta. "One did not die."

Wurklu jerked round to look at the boy. "I thought you slew that one," he said.

"One I did slay," was the answer. "A rough and violent youth, fierce at fighting and bold at theft. He seized the dog and I pursued him, and when we came to grips he gave me an unexpected blow and upset me; but the dog got loose and bit him, then fled, or thought to; and the youth in his fury killed the dog, preferring it dead to seeing it back with me, and to even the score I put three arrows in him. Yes, that one went to the world of ghosts, but I did not speak of him."

"You speak riddles," observed someone.

"No," said Ranta. "There was a second youth, hid-

den in a ledge of rock and armed with both spear and arrows."

Juk grew tense. The talk was of him, and it seemed to him that Ranta was glad he had escaped.

"That one I remember," said a warrior. "Did no one chase him and kill the rascal?"

"No one," answered Ranta, with conviction. "I searched afterward and he was gone."

The Flint Chipper could feel his heart swell. Ranta was glad he had got away! It was a sign they would be friends! Thus Juk was thinking when he herd Ranta say, slowly and with bitterness:

"He escaped, and did not deserve to. The one who died from my three arrows was only half the cause of all my trouble over the dog. Two stole him in the first place, and the boy who fled from the hazel thicket was one of these. He, too, should have stopped arrows."

"No matter," shrugged Wurklu. "One escaped, and is no doubt still running, fleeing like a hare into the maze of the back hills. We shall never see him again."

Poor Juk! His hopes had risen high, only to be cast down again. Ranta had not spoken of him out of friendliness but out of hate. The death of the dog had outraged him; he could not forget it.

"He hates me," whispered Juk to himself, and drew back.

Where was Juk going? Nowhere. There was no place that he *could* go, and be happy. He was alone, like a single spark of life in a hostile world. The Beast Herders evidently did not feel toward him as he felt toward them, and that was a pity. Juk had rather expected Ranta to show signs of wanting to be friends, and he had not. It was a wretched outlook, although he did not mean to go away. No, he would lurk here near the camp, hoping for a chance to ease things between himself and Ranta.

"In the morning perhaps he will herd, and I can talk to him," thought Juk.

Hoping in this fashion, he hunted out a shallow little grotto in the side of a limestone cliff, and went to sleep. It was not hard. Juk was hungry, but most of all he needed rest, and now, in spite of all his forebodings, he got it. Scarcely had his eyes closed before he was slumbering, not so much as moving a finger until after dawn the next day.

It was the bawling of the calf that aroused him. Up he jumped, thinking himself near a drove of wild cattle, and then remembering the young one that the Beast Herders had captured the day before. He climbed down from the cliff, took a drink from a stream, and went off toward the camp in the valley.

"Today I shall talk to Ranta," he murmured.

Things were shaping to that end. The camp was astir, children crying for food, women scolding, men shouting and giving orders. Fire leaped up against the layer of rising white mist, the odor of meat pushed into the air. Off toward the pond stood the horses, stamping softly; and from where Juk went creeping the creatures were dim and ghostly, like monsters that threaten people and yet cannot come and seize them, because of the fire which men have built against them. Juk slipped as close as he dared, waiting for the Beast Herders to gulp down food, and listening for plans about the horses.

"I will tend the calf's wounds," said Wurklu finally. "The rest of you can fish or hunt, or what you will, but Ranta herds. South to the end of the pond and east a little, there is good grass there."

Juk smiled broadly. It was all working out. The demons were with him; or at least they were not against him. No, he should not have said that they were *with* him. Spirits and such things are never your friends; the most you can hope for is that they will leave you alone, and not plague or confound you. That was what they were doing to Juk this morning; they were letting him be. And it was enough. Cheerfully he crawled around to the eastern side of the valley, soaking wet from dew and scratched by thorns, and much hungrier

than last night, yet content. The big thing, the dominating thing in his life just now was to talk to Ranta.

He halted presently and put his ear against the earth, listening. The horses were coughing and stamping, but they had not yet left camp. The Flint Chipper waited, impatient for the rising sun to cut away the mist, impatient to see Ranta. It was an astonishing thing, but Juk's pulses were racing like mad: he was excited as a boy on his first reindeer hunt. Ah, it was a bad thing to live alone, just as it was going to be a good thing to live with the Beast Herders—if only they would take him in.

"Now the horses are coming," he murmured, "the horses and Ranta."

The mist was breaking up, especially back from the pond. Ranta was letting the horses drift, cropping grass as they went. The herd moved slowly, the boy gradually sending them away from the pond and toward the east, where the mist was practically gone and the sun was warm and bright. Then lest the creatures stray too far toward the wooded hills, Ranta walked out around them and came to sit down on a rock, and though he did not know it he was but a stone's throw from Juk.

"No demons to interfere," Juk was whispering. "I can talk to him. He is alone, far from the others. But how shall I do it, without danger to me?"

That was the problem. Ranta had said fierce things about Juk at last night's campfire, and the Flint Chipper had not forgotten. What was Juk to do? If he came up to the herder he would be risking an arrow in his hide; if he called it was possible that someone at the camp would hear him. Finally he decided upon a pebble. Yes, that was the best way. Tossed just right, a small stone will attract attention without startling the thing it has been tossed at. Hunters wanting deer to move without running are often able to accomplish this end by a discreet throwing of pebbles. Juk had once called Awal away from the tribe by this means; Awal had heard, looked round, and had come in response to Juk's beckoning finger. No doubt a pebble would work upon Ranta, attracting his attention but not alarming or provoking him.

Silent as a shadow, Juk picked up a pebble and tossed it toward the horse herder. The stone made a faint clatter but Ranta did not look round. He sat with his back to Juk, his shoulders hunched slightly forward, no part of him moving. Perhaps he was buried in thought; this often happens when you are off by yourself. Juk tossed another pebble.

To this second pebble there was a swift response. Ranta turned round, saw Juk in the underbrush, and sprang to his feet. Instantly he fitted an arrow to his

bow, and would have let it fly, but the Flint Chipper ducked out of sight and ran quickly to another place, as sky birds do when they come to earth and fear some enemy will come to the spot where they landed. Juk darted off to the south, got behind a tree, and peeped out. He saw that Ranta had not pursued him, and that was encouraging.

"I am here," Juk ventured to say.

Ranta whirled, bow and arrow ready. This time, however, he did not try to shoot, for he saw that Juk was on guard and also rather far away for an arrow. He stood there gazing at Juk, his face stern and unfriendly.

"So!" exclaimed the horse herder.

Juk did not know what he meant by this, but he welcomed talk of any kind, and accordingly nodded and smiled.

"Yes," he said.

"It is you, eh!" said Ranta.

"Yes, I am here. The others were killed, but I was not."

"You deserved to die with them," Ranta frowned.

"Perhaps," said Juk, "but I escaped."

"Because you fled like a coward."

"No, not that. I fought with spear and arrow, but I saw the tribe was lost, and I hurried away."

Ranta rubbed his teeth together to show that he was angry. "You went searching for me," he declared, "thinking to slip up on me and put a spear in my back."

"I went after Awal," retorted the Flint Chipper.

"And found him dead!"

"Yes."

"He killed my dog," said Ranta moodily. "First he stole it, then he killed it. And once before the two of you stole it. Do you deny it?"

"No," said Juk, after a moment of hesitation.

"Dog stealers!" said Ranta, in a bitter tone. "That is all you are, thieves and snail-eating hunters who are scarcely human at all, but more like the demons that dwell underground. I will not forget that dog and what happened to him."

Juk made a friendly little gesture. "Surely a man balances a dog," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Awal is dead, the dog is dead," was the reply. "Why hold malice any farther? The score is settled."

"No. It will not be settled until you, too, are slain."

"What!" cried Juk in amazement.

"It is true," growled Ranta. "There is a fire burning inside me, and it will not be smothered until you are dead, you thief that takes dogs! That four-foot was dear to me."

"I know."

"How do you know!" cried Ranta. "You know nothing of the pleasure that tame beasts give people, because you spring from hunting stock, always killing and never keeping pets alive. A curse upon you for daring to take my dog in the beginning."

"I will make it up to you," said Juk, and he spoke hastily, not liking this talk of curses. "Hearken to me, Ranta, I—"

"Where did you learn my name?" exploded the horse-herder.

"You yourself told it to me, that day in the woods."

"Ho, the day you and the other one tried to kill me."

Juk shook his head. "We did not try that. We only wanted to get one of your arrows."

"Is that all?" said Ranta, in a strange voice. "Well, then, here it is!"

With this he suddenly discharged an arrow at Juk, the thing coming so swiftly that the Flint Chipper had barely time to duck away from it. The arrow lodged in a tree, the shaft quivering from side to side and making the feathered end look like a blur, instead of what it really was. Juk threw a glance at it and said to Ranta, regretfully:

"You want to kill me?"

"Why not!"

"I thought it would be different."

"Different, eh!"

"I thought we could be friends," said Juk.

"Ha, you are mad. You are like a weasel that loses its sense in the autumn, after a long hot dry summer, and runs wildly in all directions, showing its teeth and biting whatever it finds."

"I do not want to bite," murmured the Flint Chipper. "I only wanted to be one of you."

"One of us?"

"The tribe, I mean."

"*Our* tribe?"

"Yes."

Ranta threw back his head and laughed. "You are truly a heat-maddened weasel," he declared. "Why, you are a born enemy. If any of us gets a chance at your hide it will have holes in it, and if you had sense you would know it."

"I have sense," replied Juk, "but I do not want to know such things as that."

"You will get killed if you prowl around here."

"Why should that be?" demanded Juk, with a show of spirit. "I would hurt no one. My people are gone, and I am alone. That is a bad thing. Would *you* like it?"

"It is a foolish thing to ask," said Ranta jeeringly, "because I am *not* alone."

"But suppose you were."

"Suppose I were a heron," retorted the horse herder. "I would have a long beak and bony legs, probably, but I am *not* a heron, nor alone in the world. You speak nonsense."

"I could help your tribe," said Juk.

"What! You could help *us?*"

"Yes. Keep back your laughter and listen. You have arrows and yet they could be better. Bows, and the shafts and feathered ends of arrows, you people make very well; but the flint heads I could do better than any of you."

"Ha!" said Ranta, and made a face to show his scorn for such talk.

"It is true," said Juk earnestly. "Do you know what I was called in my tribe?"

"The mad weasel, no doubt!"

"I was known as the Flint Chipper," Juk told him. "Because I am clever at such things. If your people were to take me into the tribe—"

"You are a fool," jeered Ranta. "Go away, I am weary of your jay chatter."

"Then if you tell me to go away you do not want to kill me," said Juk shrewdly.

"I will catch you off guard some day," retorted Ranta. "As it is now, you dodge and will not come close

enough, and I have no mind to waste my arrows. Go where you like, I will end by coming across you when you cannot dodge, then the score between us will be settled, and perhaps after that I will forget the dog you and the other one took from me."

Juk shook his head. "I will not go far," he said. "There is no place for me, save here. Look, I will toss you an arrowhead from my pouch. Take it to your chief and show it to him. He will see it is better than any you Beast Herders can make, and he will perhaps relent against me. Here!"

Opening his pouch the boy took the best of the arrowheads he carried there, and tossed it toward the horse herder. Ranta did not stir; then Juk noticed something which startled him. A man was coming from the direction of the camp, dragging behind him the calf the Beast Herders had taken prisoner in the woods.

"Tell Wurklu what I say, and show him the arrow," said Juk hastily. "I will come back tomorrow."

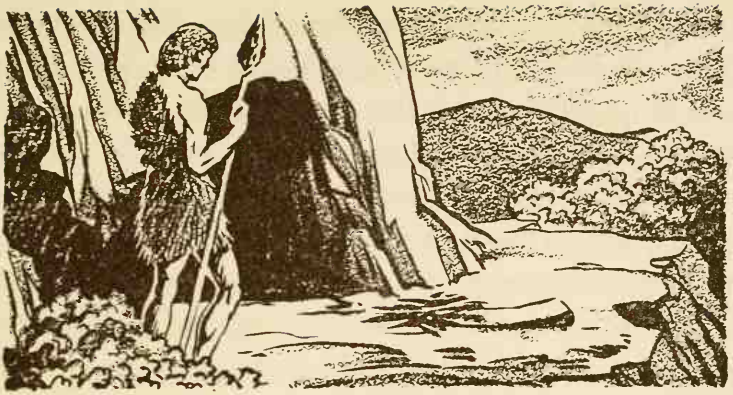
So saying, he slipped off among the trees, casting a glance back over his shoulder to see if Ranta followed him or not. The horse herder had not budged. He was standing like a rock, and Juk considered this a good sign.

"There is doubt in him," thought Juk, "and doubt is better than unchanging hate. Curiosity will make him take up the arrowhead, and when he shows it to the

others it will be seen how much better it is made than their own. Tomorrow I shall go back to talk further to Ranta; or perhaps later today I shall do that, after the man with the calf goes away."

The man with the calf did not go away. He had brought the creature to stay with the horses, thinking that it would be more content with other four-foots. Binding its forelegs with a thong, the man sat down beside Ranta and prepared to spend the day, talking and yawning. Juk watched, and he saw Ranta go and pick up the arrowhead, but whether the young horse herder spoke of it to his companion or not Juk could not tell. After a long time Juk turned to go and hunt for food, uncertain but hopeful.

"Tomorrow I shall know," he whispered to himself.



CHAPTER XIX

A Prowler Caught

"TONIGHT Ranta will show my arrowhead to the chief of the tribe," thought Juk; "and tomorrow the Beast Herders will let me come live with them, to make flints for their hunters."

Perhaps so, but meanwhile it was today and Juk was hungry. He went into the woods, looking for something that could be eaten. For a long while he found only beechnuts and certain berries that no one had ever bothered to name. Then he flushed a hare, hurled one of his stone hatchets, and killed the thing.

Juk took the hare and strode off to a solitary ravine where he knew no one would disturb him. With flints out of his pouch he kindled a blaze, piled on wood, and dressed the hare. The skin he left on. He did not intend to roast the meat because that way part of it was always burned away, and this afternoon he was so hungry that he wanted every bit of meat the hare could give him. Accordingly he dug a shallow hole in the ground near the fire, put in the unskinned hare, covered it lightly with dirt, and heaped coals upon the spot. This method would keep all the juice intact, and likewise prevent even the skin from burning; it would take more time, of course, but then Juk had plenty of time.

"I have too much time," he murmured, as he drew back to sit down and wait for the hare to cook. "If I could work magic I would sweep today off the hills to the west and bring tomorrow fresh from over the hills in the east. Then I would see Ranta and know what has passed between him and the others of his tribe."

The Flint Chipper said this and fell silent. He blinked at the heap of coals he had piled over the buried hare. The coals glowed and darkened, brightened and faded, and in these changes showed many indistinct little outlines. People like Juk often thought that these shapes were omens of what was to come, especially when the

immediate future was very uncertain and also dangerous. Juk studied the outlines in the coals, wondering if they had anything to do with Ranta. There was one uncertain image which might be a boy, but it was broken and feeble, and that worried the young flint chipper. A short-lasting image of a person meant a short life for that person, which was bad. Awal had died, Ranta must not die. If he did then Juk would be entirely alone, no one of his own age to be his comrade.

"If I were Goort the wizard," he muttered, "I should make an image of Ranta which could not fade away like the outlines there in the coals."

What sort of image? Surely not mud or clay, because that would get broken. The image must be of harder material, able to endure a long time, so that this would magically suggest a long life for the Ranta who was the original.

"H'm," said Juk, and drew his flint dagger. He played with it a little, trying to conceal from himself that he meant to carve an image of Ranta. Turning the knife over and over in his mind he pretended that he was not thinking beyond the weapon itself, the rugged sharp blade, the rounded handle made smoother still by dabs of pitch. Juk tried the blade on a twig, then he went to a tree and hacked off a limb the thickness of his wrist. From this limb he cut a length a little longer than

his middle finger, and came back to sit beside the fire. "I might as well trim wood while I wait for the hare," he said aloud.

All pretense. Juk was about to attempt a serious bit of magic, and since he was no wizard this was risky. The demons might resent it, although if he could finish the image before they realized what it was, probably he would be safe. That was why the boy whittled with an air of carelessness, carving and nicking and shaving away splinters of wood, and saying aloud that it was nothing, it was only nonsense, it had no meaning. But finally the piece of wood revealed the crude outline of a human being, whereupon Juk hastened to bring it to what he would have called the resemblance of Ranta himself, though no one but Juk would have thought that.

"It is finished," he said triumphantly. "Did I say it was nothing? That was trickery. Here is an image, and I declare it is Ranta, and so long as wood last, so long will his life last; and so long as I keep this image in my pouch, so long will I have him near me, to be my friend and companion!"

Laughter bubbled out of him. It was a great victory, not only over the demons but also over fear and all the uncertainties of the morrow. Now he possessed a thing which was magically the horse herder Ranta. He would

keep the image, guarding it, enjoying it, never losing it.

Juk put the little wooden doll into his pouch, but when he did that the sky seemed to cloud over, and the air grow cool. He took it out again, smiling at it and whispering. Then just as people talk to statues and pictures, Juk talked to the image of Ranta.

"I am your friend, and you are my friend," he said. "That is how it must be. People cannot live alone. A mammoth can do that, but even a mammoth is not happy that way; the big beast that we killed in the back hills, he was sorrowful for the lack of a comrade. When he let out his cry it was a grieving cry, such as I myself could have let out when I saw Awal and all the others dead, and knew that I had been left alone. The last mammoth was glad to die, I think, because his loneliness was a mountain upon him. But as for me, the mountain is slipping off me, for the reason that I have you. Today I have this image of you, after today I shall have you in flesh and blood, warm to my eye and your voice sounding in my ears. It is a bad thing to be alone."

The odor of cooked meat crawled up out of the ground and into Juk's nostrils. He put down the image, ready to eat. With his spear he brushed aside the coals and dug down to the hare, lifting it out of the hole on the tip of the spearhead. The meat was steaming hot,

and when it had cooled a bit he ripped away the skin and ate, enjoying the juices and the tender meat and even the bones which were so soft that it gave him pleasure to crunch them.

"Take food," he said, and offered the wooden image a sliver of meat. He laughed, as he added: "Wood cannot eat meat, but a living boy can, and when you and I are together, Ranta, I will share all my meat with you."

Suddenly he looked around, startled and uneasy. What was it? There was no sound, and he was certain that neither beast nor human foe was about. It was something else—the sun. All this while the day had been fading, the sun sinking toward the western hills, the light growing softer. Night was not far off, and to primitive man night was a daily worry. Juk put the image in his pouch, took his spear and the remnant of hare which was left, and turned to go. He must get to some kind of camp before nightfall, either camp or shelter where he could feel tolerably safe between now and morning. Last night, and the night before, he had been too frightened and bewildered to care where he stayed; now it was different. He cared; he had his wits back; he was human again.

He went to the cave where his tribe had spent the winter, the cave which Karakaa's people had occupied at the time of the coming of the Beast Herders. Juk

climbed the steps cut into the side of the cliff, aware of a curious chill in his bones. Was it that the sun had gone down? No, it was still shining. The chill had been put into him by the solitary and deserted cave which was no longer a habitation for human beings. The boy reached the ledge and rose to his feet, staring about. A dead fire met his eyes, the charred sticks soaked by recent rain, the ashes tossed here and there by the wind. The entrance to the cave was a yawning black hole, inexpressibly gloomy and sinister. No one had been here since the Hunting People had fled. And now the ones who had lived here were dead; except for Juk they were ghosts.

"They are ghosts," whispered the boy, "so what if they come back?"

That would be a calamity. No man could slay a ghost, even if he had the courage to try it. The only thing you could do was to flee, resolving to avoid all future meetings with people who were dead and yet insisted upon wandering about. Where did ghosts go when they wandered? Chiefly they sought out their old camps, it was said. They might come here, therefore. After dark, perhaps, and it was already nearing sunset.

Juk clambered down the side of the cliff, but when he had reached the bottom he had a plan. The ghosts would see his tracks going up and then descending; they would

think he had fled the neighborhood. What of it? Ah, a good deal. The place for Juk to spend the night was near this very cave; not in it, but close by. More than that, it occurred to him that he could roost in a place which would enable him to see the fire of the Beast Herders. Above the cave there was a lookout station, and though it could be reached from the ledge in front of the grotto it could also be gained from another approach. The Flint Chipper cut up the ravine, scaled a brushy hillside, circled round on top of a rocky bluff, and worked his way down to the lookout station from above.

Here he settled himself for the night, munching the last of the hare and watching the valley. The sun glowed with bright warmth, sharpening the outline of things for a brief while and then dying like a stag with a spear in its throat. Down by the pond the Beast Herders were building up their fire, and in the calm clear twilight the sound of their voices came faintly to Juk, far away and unreal like the quacking of ducks high in the heavens, out of sight and seemingly a dream.

"Tomorrow night I shall perhaps be down there," Juk told himself. "It will be a good thing, too. I am weary of this."

The dusk shut down, the world little by little a different thing than it had been a while ago. Was it that

the air was cooler, the light weaker, the stillness deeper? That was part of it, but another and a greater part was something which Juk could not fathom, something which not even the people of our enlightened time can altogether explain. The night world is steeped in mystery and uncertainty; it differs from the day world in a multitude of subtle suggestions, a host of faint yet significant emphases and hints and elusive puzzles. Juk felt that, even though vaguely and without the power to put it into words. The night settled upon him and he grew silent, wide-eyed and watchful, until weariness took him, and then he slept.

Slept, and rose next morning feeling very bright and cheerful. His eyes went instantly to the fire down by the pond, the sight of people there filling his bones with courage.

"I will go down the ridge on the east," said Juk, "so as to be there when Ranta comes with the horses."

Now it might have been that someone else herded today, yet it was Ranta, and no other. It was a clear fine day, the feel of rain in the air, but so far nothing but sunshine and warmth. Juk trudged down the ridge, now and then pausing to grin through the brush in the direction of the pond. The Beast Herders were sending up their usual early morning clamor, the horses were stamping and snuffling in their impatience to get to

grazing. Soon the herd started out, the lead mare hobbling along in front, the others following, as Ranta in turn followed them. The horses went southeast, passed a little beyond the place where they had fed yesterday, and halted of their own accord. Here there was fresh grass, and that was all they wanted. Juk crept down through the brush. He could see Ranta, wandering idly out around the herd, to get between them and the woods.

Ranta was armed as before, stone knife and bow and arrows, but today he seemed more at ease than when Juk had talked to him last. That was a good sign, Juk told himself. The young horse herder was easier because he was prepared to be friendly.

Presently Ranta sat down on a rock, yawning a little, as though he were still sleepy. Juk grinned and crawled forward. This time he would not throw pebbles. It was not necessary. Cupping a hand to the corner of his mouth he called softly:

"Ho, you!"

The horse herder turned round. He looked toward Juk, and Juk rose up from behind the bushes, smiling broadly. Ranta smiled back at him, apparently willing to be friends.

"You came back!" exclaimed Ranta.

"As I said I would," said the Flint Chipper.

"Come closer," said Ranta. "It will be easier to talk."

True enough, and yet Juk hesitated. There was in him a deep desire to be comrades with this boy, but at the same time he could not forget that they had been enemies. They were of different racial stock, different tribes; and only yesterday Ranta had hated him and tried to put an arrow through him. Juk wanted to come forward, but first he thought it wiser to make sure of how things stood.

"Let us talk this way," said Juk.

Ranta laughed, traces of contempt in his face. "Are you afraid of me?" he said.

"Yesterday you shot an arrow at me," Juk reminded him.

"Ah, that was yesterday, and gone forever. Today is today."

"Today is today, and different?" inquired Juk.

"Yes."

"How is it different? The flint pleased them?"

"The flint?" said Ranta, wrinkling his brow.

"Yes; the arrowhead I gave you. I saw you pick it up. What did your chief say about it?"

The horse herder chuckled. "Wurklu was surprised," he said. "So were the others. They could not believe that you chipped the arrowhead."

"And when I practice more," said Juk proudly, "I shall be able to do better than that. What else did they say?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" exclaimed Juk, then he saw Ranta's face change and grow secret, and he guessed that there was something else. "They said more," he declared. "If they thought the arrowhead good, they must have wanted more like it."

"We have arrowheads," said Ranta.

Juk was taken aback. He did not know what to think.

"Did you tell them I would like to be taken into the tribe?" he asked.

"I did," said Ranta, "and they laughed."

"Why did they laugh?"

"Because it amused them. You are a stranger; how is it possible for us to take you in! It would be like feeling how sharp are the teeth of a wild cat—dangerous and bound to end in bloody wounds."

"No, no, it would not be like that," protested the Flint Chipper.

"It would be as I have said," replied Ranta firmly. "Look, you already have my stone hatchet, keeping it as your own since the day you stole it."

"I did not steal it, but picked it up in the meadow where you left it," said Juk. "Do you want it?"

"Why not?"

"Then I will give it you," and Juk drew it from his

belt and tossed it toward the horse herder, saying, as Ranta sprang to one side: "Why do you do that? I do not want to hurt you. I was not trying to hit you with the hatchet."

Ranta picked up his hatchet, grunting: "I did not know."

"You should know by this time," Juk told him. "I am friendly."

"I tell you that you are a stranger," said Ranta, in a harsh tone. "That is enough. Strangers are evil. They do bad things and must not be trusted. Probably you did magic last night and that was why our calf died."

"Is the calf dead?" asked Juk.

"You know it is."

"I know it now, since you tell me; but before not. I had nothing to do with it."

"Someone killed it."

"Then it was Beast Herders," said Juk. "There were wounds in it when you brought it out of the woods. Your people shot it with arrows to stop it, and it died from that."

"Anyhow it is dead," answered Ranta grudgingly, then he went on, as though it did not matter: "We can get more calves. There are many of them in the hills, and we know how to catch them. Some day we shall get another, and then another and another, keeping and

taming them and teaching them to graze with the others, until in the end we have a herd of cattle as we already have a herd of horses. We have half-tame horses, we shall have half-tame cattle; and between the two we shall not need to go hunting, except for the pleasure of it."

Juk nodded. "That will be a fine thing," he said, "I would like to help in that."

"You!" cried Ranta scornfully. "I did not speak of you. We Beast Herders want nothing of you."

"Are you still angry because Awal killed your dog?" asked Juk, regret in his face.

"I am."

"And will you never forget your anger?"

"When does a man forget his hunger?" demanded Ranta. "He forgets after he has filled himself tight with meat. I will forget my anger against you when I have slain you, not before!"

The Flint Chipper gaped at him in dismay. What was wrong? Ranta had been so friendly this morning, and now he seemed as hostile as before! He had not changed, he had only appeared to. Juk began to stammer:

"If you feel that way against me, and the chief of your tribe feels the same—"

"He feels the same, and all the others agree with him," retorted the horse herder. "Where are you going?"

Juk had turned away, but at this he halted, facing Ranta with new hope.

"Do you want me to stay?" he asked.

"Why not stay?" said Ranta evasively. "You and I are enemies, but enemies sometimes amuse each other. I will explain why you cannot be taken into our tribe. Do you want me to do that?"

"Yes."

"It is because strangers are always treacherous," said Ranta. "They cannot help it. Evil and slyness and treachery are their nature, as it is the nature of people within a tribe to stick together and give mutual aid in times of trouble."

"Strangers are not always that way," Juk protested.

"Always," Ranta insisted. "The night bull himself has said so."

"The night bull?"

"Yes, the bull that roamed the world and shook it with his bellowings, then after his death climbed into the sky and became the full moon. Have you never heard the tale?"

"No."

Ranta made a grimace to show his contempt. "You have lived in a hole in the ground," he told Juk, "seeing no more than a mole, and hearing as little. I will tell you the story. The bull became the full moon, and he was a

friend of all the stars, because whenever they were late-coming, or weak-shining, or got tangled in clouds, the moon would shine for them, and thus keep them from being punished by the demon which created them and set them to illuminate the sky. But one day a strange hunter appeared on the earth, and he chased a bear until it fled against the dusk of the eastern horizon, and the hunter guessed that the creature had fled up over the hills into the sky, thinking to escape him. Then the stranger asked the stars to let him climb them, using them like steps cut into the side of a cliff, so that he could slay his bear. And the stars agreed, but after the stranger had got into the heavens, and could not find the bear, he saw the moon which was once a bull, and he thought to slay it instead of the bear. The stars objected, but he laughed at them, whereupon they pulled apart, wanting to save their friend the moon and not caring for the treacherous stranger; and when they pulled apart there was no longer anything for the hunter to stand upon, and he fell to the earth and broke his neck. That was because he was not to be trusted; and neither are you."

"Then I shall go away and bother you no more," said Juk heavily, and he was actually going when Ranta cried out:

"Wait, there is another thing I would tell you. Have you heard me sing?"

"Sing?"

"Yes. I make songs inside me, and they come out my mouth and amuse me. Here is one I shall make for you."

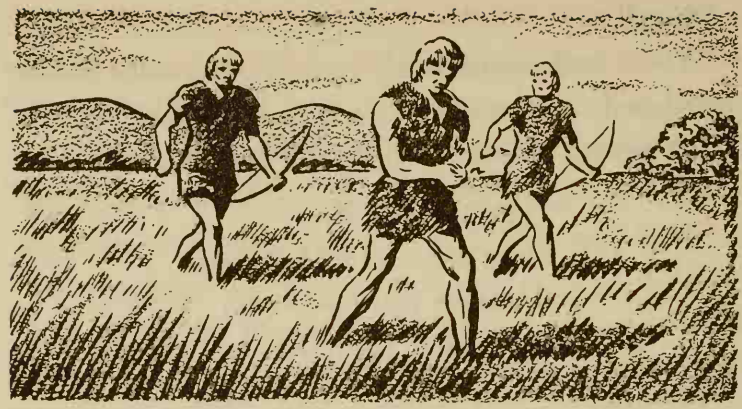
Juk paused to listen, and Ranta sang this song:

"Eat and grow fat,
Make hide and make meat;
We'll eat you tomorrow,
Eat all but your feet!"

The Flint Chipper smiled faintly. "It is a song to the horses?" he asked.

"Yes," said Ranta, then suddenly he began to laugh, and that was a warning to Juk.

"I am going," exclaimed Juk, but it was too late. Men had risen up behind him, springing out of brush hiding-places and aiming arrows at him, so that he knew he could not flee without yielding up his life. The Beast Herders had captured him.



CHAPTER XX

"If You Lose You Die"

THERE was a stark silence, no one speaking. Juk gazed at the Beast Herders who were surrounding him, arrows ready for anything he might try to do. They closed in on him, one of them making a gesture to indicate that he was to drop his weapons. Without a word the Flint Chipper cast down his spear and stone hatchet as well as his knife. Ranta came forward and picked up the prisoner's weapons, whereupon Juk broke his silence. He glared at the young horse herder:

"So you betrayed me!"

"Betray is not the word for catching a stranger," answered Ranta.

"Your heart is black and false," said Juk bitterly. "I came wanting to be friendly, and you showed me an open countenance. We talked, and when I thought to go you held me with tales and a made-up song, which was all a trick. You were keeping me until these warriors could slip up through the woods and take me."

One of the Beast Herders laughed. "You are thick-witted," he told Juk, "but not *too* thick-witted. Start out!"

"Where do I go?"

"To our camp, of course. You would have been slain here on the spot, but one interfered in that, postponing it for a time."

"Not Ranta, surely," retorted Juk.

"You are right," said the horse herder. "It was the chief of our tribe, Wurklu, he who wants to ask you certain questions before you are finished off."

Juk drew a deep breath. So they meant to kill him, after all! He stole a glance at the woods, wondering if he would stand a chance of getting to cover before the Beast Herders could fill him with arrows. Then his captors saw what was in his mind and bound him, leaving his feet free so that he could walk, but taking a

thong and tying his two thumbs tightly together in front of him. The Flint Chipper saw his chances of escape go glimmering away. With his thumbs bound he could neither run well nor climb trees and cliffs, and certainly he would need to do both of these things if he were to get away from his enemies.

"Start for camp," said a Beast Herder, and gave him a shove.

Grim and tight-lipped, Juk set out for the camp by the pond, his captors behind him. The boy did not glance toward Ranta, yet he knew that he was coming. Hoof sounds told him that. Ranta was moving the horses in toward the pit-houses, wanting to be a witness to the things which were to happen to the prisoner.

"He is a foul betrayer," muttered Juk. "I am sorry I ever put trust in him."

"March on," said a man behind him.

"Yes, and without words," said another. "Save your wind to answer the thing which Wurklu will ask you."

"I shall do as you say," nodded Juk, and wondered what sort of questions the chief of the tribe would put to him.

He would soon know. The camp was nearer and nearer, and already the Beast Herders were gathering to wait for him. Children squealed and ran behind their mothers, women chattered and pointed, the men stood

calm and watchful, while Juk strode closer. The odor of drying fish came to him; he passed the smaller of the two pit-houses. A rabble of women and children flowed out and around and up behind him, calling taunts and laughing.

Then a warrior stepped into the center of the camp and held up his hand, and at once the clamor stopped. Juk halted; he looked at this warrior, and saw that it was the chief of the Beast Herders, the one called Wurklu. He was a tall, well-proportioned man, intelligent and resolute, and under pleasanter circumstances Juk would have admired him; as it was, the boy hated him.

"Let there be no more chattering," said Wurklu; "and you women especially, stop playing the jay and the magpie. I shall talk to the prisoner."

A child had begun again, but at this order the mother hushed it. The women and children drew back, the warriors formed a circle about the prisoner. Wurklu sat down upon a piece of log, his men squatted on the ground. Juk heard the horses draw near and stop, but he did not look round: he told himself that he was finished with Ranta, despising him for the hateful things he had done.

Suddenly Wurklu grinned.

"What do they call you?" he asked the Flint Chipper.

"My name is Juk," said the boy.

"Of the tribe which pestered us lately?"

"Yes; the tribe of Karakaa."

Wurklu touched the bear-claw necklace at his throat. "He who once wore this was Karakaa?"

"Yes," said Juk. "He was our chief; and what is more, he did not find those claws upon a dead man, but took them from a raging bear that had first to be slain."

A murmur of amusement passed around the circle of men. Curiously enough, Wurklu was not offended, but seemed to approve what Juk had blurted out.

"I likewise took this necklace from a raging bear," murmured Wurklu, "one known to you as Karakaa, it appears. He raged, but not enough. I was not frightened but advanced and slew him, taking his claws as a remembrance of one who ought never to have crossed my path in the beginning. But that is water which has already passed down the river to the sea. Let us speak of you. Juk, your name is; and you are the lone survivor of your tribe?"

"Yes."

"That is good," said Wurklu.

"Yes, and as soon as this one is finished the tribe will be utterly wiped out," said another warrior.

"Patience," smiled the chief. "There is time for that. I first have questions to ask. Listen to me, Juk! You tossed an arrowhead to Ranta, but you lied about it!"

"How did I lie?" demanded Juk.

"You said you yourself chipped it, which is a lie."

"It is no lie, it is the truth."

Mutters began to be heard from the warriors, and the one who had spoken before spoke again. He was a sturdy, self-reliant man, apparently next to Wurklu in power.

"He lies," said this one. "It is impossible that he could do it."

"So say I, Buryen," grumbled a withered old man who sat on Wurklu's left hand. "It is false what he claims, a kind of pretending magic."

Juk looked at the old man. Evidently he was the magician of the tribe, for he wore many charms and good-luck pieces, and his face was marked with the scars of many a ceremonial struggle with evil spirits. Like Goort, he doubtless felt that ugliness would frighten demons away, and accordingly he had slashed his cheeks and chin with a knife, trusting to the resulting scars to alarm the spirits he was combatting.

"Is it magic you try to do?" Wurklu asked the Flint Chipper.

"No," said Juk. "Why should it be magic?"

"Because we have rarely seen an arrowhead as good as this," said the chief, taking the bit of flint from his pouch. "And never have we known a boy who could

do the like. None of our tribe could chip so fine an arrowhead. Did you find this flint?"

"I made it."

"Stop twisting your tongue in lies," said Wurklu. "Where did you get this? Your people used no bows. The thing was found, and since we Beast Herders shoot arrows we would like to know the origin of this thing, wanting more of the same."

There was a bit of hope in Juk when he heard this. Ranta had come up to squat with the rest of the men, but Juk kept his eyes from him. The Flint Chipper gazed steadfastly at the chief saying:

"I made the arrowhead, and can make even better ones."

"Do it then," retorted Wurklu.

"With my thumbs bound?" said Juk, with a wry smile. "That would truly be magic!"

Wurklu made a sign, and the man called Buryen rose and cut the thong which had held Juk's thumbs together.

"Do it," said Wurklu again.

"Without flint?" asked Juk, laughing a little. "You are queer people, talking like children! Bring me flint, but good flint, such as comes from the mine in the back hills, the one that the false-hearted Ranta knows about."

Ranta scowled at this, but no one paid any attention

to him. Someone brought a lump of good flint, and Juk took it and sat down on the ground with it. He rubbed his thumbs to get the numbness out of them, then he opened his pouch and took out the bone with which he customarily did his flaking. The Beast Herders watched, skeptical yet interested. They did not believe that this youth could do as he claimed, but certainly he studied flint like one who understood it.

Gradually the stone in Juk's hands began to take shape. He flaked away what he did not want, coming skillfully to the central core which was to be the arrow. Now he proceeded more slowly, for a single false move at this point might ruin everything, arrow and his chance for life as well. It was clear to Juk. The Beast Herders did not believe he could make good flint weapons, but if he proved he could they would probably be glad to take him into the tribe, no longer wanting to slay him as a stranger and an enemy. Juk considered that the chipping of this arrowhead was a chance to save himself; it was a matter of life and death, no less. His hands trembled a little at the thought, but he struggled to remain calm. Not one stroke must be a false one, or everything would be ruined.

The air was cool and damp with rain to come, yet Juk was warm. Spots of sweat stood out upon him, his lips were dry, his eyes felt as though someone were

thrusting thorns into them. The flint in his hand grew smaller and thinner; he bent lower over it, chipping off one tiny flake after another, fashioning the point, taking great care with the base and the notches he was making there.

"It is better than the one he gave Ranta!" exclaimed Buryen, all at once.

Juk lifted his head. The arrowhead was not quite finished, but it would do, since Buryen had approved it. The boy tossed it to Wurklu, pretending to apologize:

"The thing will do, perhaps."

Wurklu examined it, and afterward he passed it to his men. There were murmurs of approval from this warrior and that one, but Wurklu remained silent, and when at last he did speak there was no praise in his mouth.

"You spring from a crude race," he said. "It is odd that you should know anything that we Beast Herders do not know."

"Not odd at all," replied Juk, and seeing that this was his chance to make a plea he went on rapidly: "Let me speak, Wurklu! You and your people are doers of marvelous things, understanding how to make pit-houses and how to tame animals and how to use the bow and arrow with skill, as well as other things which concern women, like pots made of clay, and such things. But it

is all this cleverness which has kept you from excelling in the use of flint. You have horses, so you need not hunt so much as my own people did. Instead of spears you shoot arrows from afar, so you think it enough that your weapons fly and hit."

"What do you mean by that?" frowned the chief.

"I mean it is a marvel that arrows can kill game," said Juk, "and that blinds you to the need of *better* arrows."

"Our arrows are good," declared Buryen.

"Good, yet not so good as they could be," Juk replied. "Yesterday this false Ranta shot an arrow at me, and it lodged in a tree instead; I saw how the shaft quivered, also how the arrowhead went into the tree on a slant. Why was that? For the reason that you do not chip flints true and in balance, but strike off a multitude of flakes and pick off the refuse until you find single untouched points which can be bound onto the shafts with little reworking. That is blundering work, akin to the wandering search which the hill tribes make for natural grottoes. You Beast Herders *make* your houses, but you only half-make your arrowheads.

"Look, here is another thing. Do you see the barb at either lower end of the arrowhead I just made? Those barbs are like the barbs on bone harpoons; they could keep the arrow fast in the game you shoot, whereas your

untouched flakes can easily come out, like so many pointed sticks. Let us make a bargain. Let me live with you and I will make flints for all the tribe, and these flints shall be better than any you yourselves could make."

Wurklu roused up. "No," he said stubbornly, "it cannot be. Our rule is to slay all strangers, and you are a stranger."

"True," murmured a certain old man; not the wizard, but another. "Strangers are evil, but this one is young, like a wolf cub or a calf we might capture. Perhaps he could be bent our way, and by letting him live we could benefit from what he knows of flint."

"He was one of the two who stole my dog," put in Ranta all at once. "If he lives, how is that score to be paid? Buryen has sworn that dog thieves must die, and I am Buryen's son and say the same thing."

"You are young to tell the tribe what it will and will not do," said Wurklu sternly. "We shall hold a council over this. Tie the prisoner, you who brought him here."

Juk was bound hand and foot, and the men of the tribe drew aside to argue what should be done with him. The boy waited in stolid silence, his heart bitter against Ranta. What was to happen to him? A misty rain had begun to fall, and still the warriors whispered together, no agreement in their faces. Toward the middle of the

afternoon the Beast Herders ate the meat that Juk had been smelling, but they gave the prisoner nothing. Then as the cloud-wrapped day went to a close, Wurklu stood up and announced his decision.

"Strangers are evil," he said to Juk, "but you are young and you excel us in flint chipping, therefore we give you a chance. You shall fight one of us, and the spirits will save you if you win the contest; but if you lose you die, and that by the blade of the one you fight."

"Ha!" exclaimed Juk. "You will match me against a warrior that I could not hope to slay!"

"You will be matched against Ranta," was the answer.

"What!" cried the astonished Flint Chipper.

"It is just," said Buryen. "I trained a dog and my son Ranta used the brute in much that he did with game and horses; you and another stole it, hence it is proper that Ranta wipe out that theft. He is your age. It is a fair match."

The chief was motioning for everyone to stand back in a circle. Women built up the fire, so that there would be light enough to see by. Rain was falling softly, and the ground was wet, but no matter: if the fighters slipped and fell they could get up again! Juk was cut loose of his bonds and pulled to his feet.

"Here is your knife," said Wurklu, and tossed it to him.

Ranta stood ready, a scowl on his face. There were no more preliminaries. Why should there be! In that rude fierce time of the world men fought with the simple intentness of animals, palaver and ceremony thrust aside, and no rules rehearsed. Rules? The only rule was to fight as best you could, and slay your enemy in any way possible.

"You are meat for my knife," said Ranta, advancing cautiously toward the Flint Chipper. "It is time to avenge my dog."

"Then do it," muttered Juk. "I hate you, and I shall kill you if I can."

Ah, but could he! Buryen had said it was a fair match, but it was not. For days now Juk had needed rest and red meat, and Ranta had had both of these. Moreover, Ranta had a mental advantage; or as primitive man would have said, a magical advantage. All these people ringed about the fighters were Ranta's people, and their ghost selves were aiding Ranta, and also the tribal wizard was no doubt whispering charms in favor of Ranta and against Juk. Silently Juk retreated round and round, his bare feet slipping in the mud, his eyes never once leaving Ranta's face.

"Strike, Ranta, strike!" called the Beast Herders. "He has coward's blood in him; he will not come to blows unless you make him."

That taunt was like a prodding thorn to Juk. He leaped forward, knife upraised, no longer waiting for Ranta to attack, but himself leading the fight. The stone knives clashed together, Ranta warding off the blow and seeking to put his own blade into his enemy. They drew apart, panting and glaring, and once more began to circle in mud, while the rain fell and the dusk settled into night.

"I would have let you go," Ranta muttered, "but I could not forget my dog. Now it is too late."

"Let it be too late," retorted Juk. "I will show you how I can fight, and without falseness in my heart, at that."

"Tell me my heart is false and I slay you quick as birds fly!" cried Ranta in a fury.

"Do it," invited Juk, and rushed him.

Ranta threw him back, nicking him on the forearm as Juk retreated. The Beast Herders were calling upon Ranta to end it, but Juk avoided him for a while, wanting to find another chance to rush him. The chance did not come; this time it was Ranta who lunged forward, and so unexpectedly that Juk slipped and fell. Ranta fell with him, and they clenched and began to roll over and over in the mud, stabbing and blocking blows. The tribesmen yelled madly, wanting blood in the savage way of people the world over, in all countries and in

all ages of history, from lowest savage to our own time. Gritting their teeth and making feints with their fists, the Beast Herders panted with the two youths struggling on the ground, their eyes ablaze with eagerness to see Ranta win. Did they hate Juk so much? No; they really did not hate him at all; it was only that he was a stranger, an enemy, and Ranta was one of themselves.

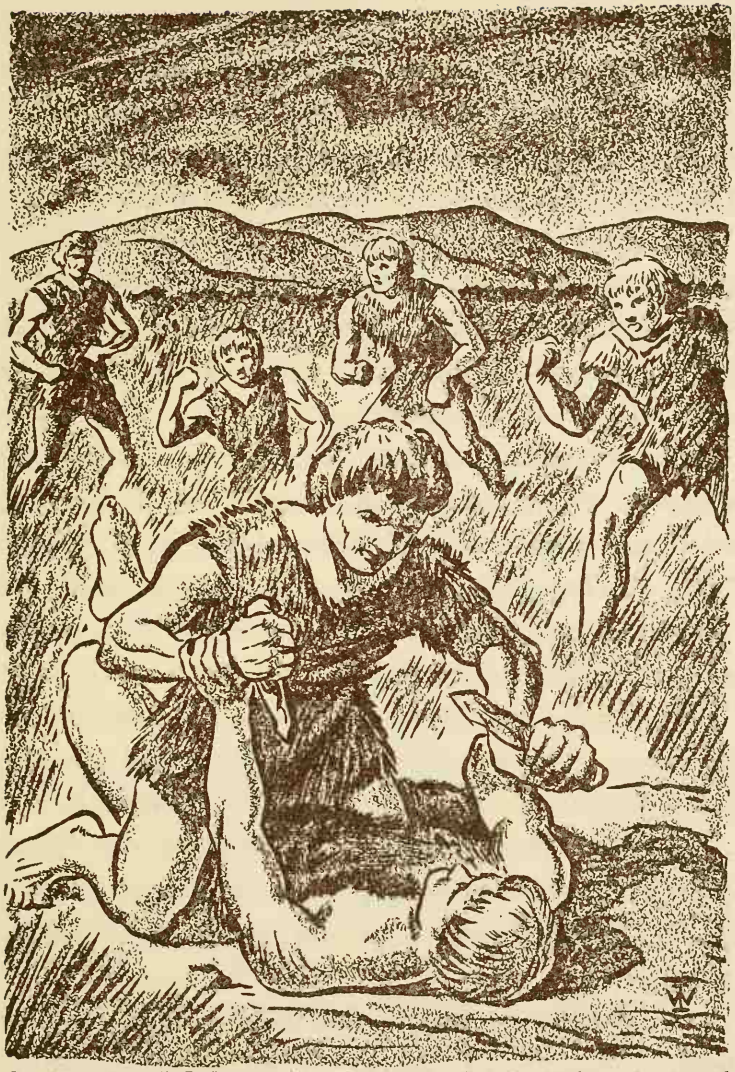
"Now I have you!" cried Ranta.

He had rolled over onto Juk and was lifting up into a sitting position, wanting a chance to thrust down with his knife. Juk lay on his back, his knife locked against his enemy's. With a wrench Ranta tried to get his blade loose, but Juk held fast. The Flint Chipper suspected that his end was approaching, nevertheless he meant to do his best, and go out fighting.

"Pull your dagger loose!" someone called to Ranta.

"Do you think I am not trying that!" Ranta retorted. "Keep still; I will get him."

Ranta jerked again, and Juk tried to upset him into the mud. Neither of them succeeded. The Flint Chipper was still on his back, Ranta's knife was still caught. The stone blades grated against each other, but neither gave way. Then Ranta changed his tactics. Instead of pulling, he pushed down, ripping his hand on Juk's dagger but getting his own knife loose. Swift as a hawk he seized Juk's right wrist in his left hand and held it out of



RANTA PRESSED DOWN AND DOWN, THE POINT OF HIS DAGGER CLOSER TO JUK'S BREAST.

harm's way. Up came his blade, Juk keeping it back with his left hand, but weakening every moment. The circle of warriors shouted madly, Ranta pressed down and down, the point of his dagger closer to Juk's breast. His eyes glared down into the Flint Chipper's.

"Now I end you," he muttered, but scarcely had he said this when something appeared to dart into Ranta. His arm wavered, his eyes changed. Juk stared up at him, desperate and mute; he expected death, yet he would not plead for mercy.

Ranta's breath came hard, his voice sank to a hoarse whisper: "We gazed at each other like this in the flint mine, but then I was trapped and you were master. You—you let me go that time. Why did you do that?"

"Who knows!" panted Juk. "I would not let you go again—because you are false."

"I am not false," whispered Ranta. "I wanted only to avenge my dog—and I cannot. It would not ease me to kill you; it would fill me with more trouble."

The Beast Herders were growing impatient. They could not hear all this talk well enough to understand it, but at least they knew it for talk, not fighting. Shouts arose:

"What is wrong, Ranta! Finish him. You have him now."

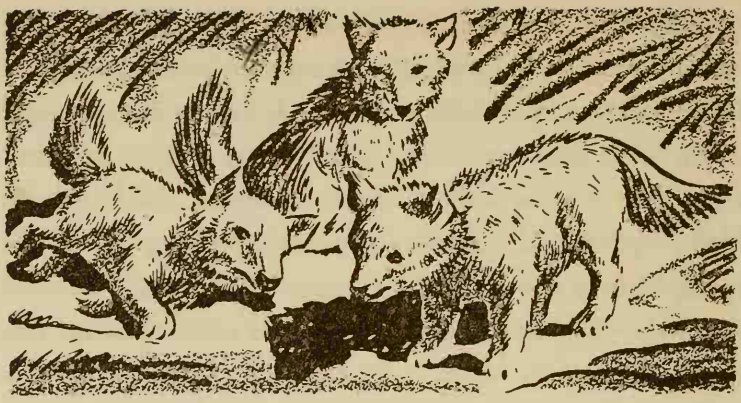
Ranta gave a cry and pressed down with his knife,

not knowing what to do, and in his confusion faltering enough to put heart in Juk. A sudden wrench and the Flint Chipper upset him in the mud; before Ranta could think what was happening Juk was on top of him and their knives were locked together again. Juk gave his blade a twist and Ranta's dagger went flying out of his hand, leaving him helpless. Then to the astonishment of the Beast Herders, Ranta and the watchers alike, Juk rose to his feet.

"I give Ranta his life," he cried in a loud voice. "There is in me no thirst for his blood, but only the wish to be his friend, and also the friend of all who are here."

There was a silence, then shouts of approval arose from the Beast Herders, and Wurklu spoke.

"So be it," he said, and in that simple fashion it was settled.



CHAPTER XXI

Young Blood Singing

AND in that simple fashion it was settled. The Beast Herders took Juk into the tribe, and from that day forward he was one of them. He slept in a pit-house and helped herd horses, and he ate from pottery and shared in all the other wonders of Wurklu's tribe, but when it was a matter of flint chipping everyone turned to Juk, seeing that he excelled them at this kind of work. For although Juk lived at the end of what we call the paleolithic period, and Ranta and his companions were neolithic people, the new-come Beast

Herders did not surpass the older stock in all things. Search the records and examine the evidence, and you will find that flint chipping reached its highest point in the paleolithic or old stone age; Juk did things with flint that no succeeding Briton has been able to do, neither savage tribes nor the present-day "kappers" who manufacture crude flints for sale among the blacks of Africa, using for their raw material the very flint deposits which Juk knew so long ago.

He had become the flint chipper of the tribe, and he was proud of that, yet mostly he had his pleasure in ranging the wooded hills with Ranta. They were friends now, armed alike with bow and arrows, and sharing confidences, the one with the other. Only one thing did Ranta keep to himself, but Juk guessed what it was. It was the dog he had treasured and lost. Ranta still grieved for the creature, and when that summer had shifted into a rainy autumn, and autumn had passed into bone-chilling winter, and winter had once more softened into spring, Juk said to Ranta:

"It is the season for wolf cubs, and I know where there is a den."

Ranta smiled a little, but said nothing. The boys set out, heading for the selfsame ridge where Juk had once hunted a wolf den with Awal. That time the wolves kept their cubs, but today they lost them.

Under a ledge of sunny rock Juk and Ranta found a burrow, and they dug down through the dirt until they heard the yapping of baby wolves, and then they rested and laughed, and afterward they worked on down to the nest and seized the three young ones there. The cubs snapped and bit at them, and one got away and hid in the rocks, but there were two left, and that was enough. Tying their legs together with thongs, the boys slung them onto their backs, Ranta carrying the cub which was to be his, Juk carrying his.

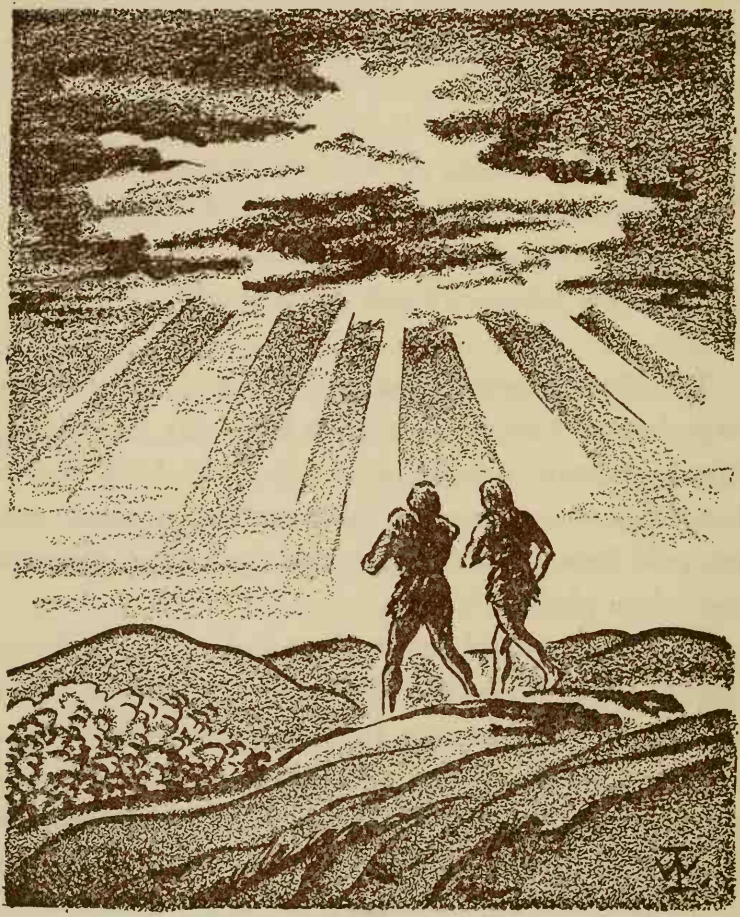
They started for home. It was late afternoon, pungent heather and gorse and juniper underfoot, the air clear and cool, the setting sun shedding a luminous glow upon the hills. Juk drew a deep breath. Now he was truly content, for Ranta had another dog, and the new one would grow into the place of the lost one, as Ranta himself had grown into the place left vacant by the death of Awal—Awal who was once a comrade to the Flint Chipper, as Ranta was a comrade now. Then Juk opened his mouth and sang his first song:

"Cubs we have found,
Deep in the ground.
We shall keep them and train them,
To help us at herding, help us at hunting,
Cubs that are ours, Ranta's and mine."

Juk sang this and waited to see what Ranta would do. If he kept silent Juk would know that his friend still grieved for the dog that Awal had slain, but if he responded to Juk's song then the Flint Chipper would know that the wound had healed. They walked on along the hillside, Ranta saying nothing for a time. Then he opened his mouth and sang a song of his own composing, which ran like this:

"A wolf is no dog, yet what does it matter?
Two things I shall cherish, above all that exist,
This wolf cub is one, and the other is Juk,
Spring is here, wounds are healing!"

The Flint Chipper looked straight ahead, not wanting to embarrass Ranta by gazing at him. Juk was happy. Bow and arrow in hand, wolf cub on his back, Ranta beside him on a spring day, there was nothing more that he could have asked for, now that Ranta had accepted the cub in place of his dog.

The boys trudged on, smiling and saying nothing, because there was nothing more to say. They cut down toward the valley, heading for the fire where the women of the tribe were roasting meat, and opening their nostrils to the odor of it. The sun sank lower, the heavens began to shift from one magic hue to another. A cuckoo

called from the woods. It was spring, and Juk and Ranta were young, and the world was also young back there in Britain ten thousand years ago, or was it eight, or even later than that?